South Haven Tribune

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September 28, 2025

Reviving a lifeguard program

Former SH lifeguards recall training efforts, as city reviews beach safety

Don Campbell / HP staff

Mike Vidmar walks along South Beach in South Haven recently. Vidmar worked as a lifeguard at the beach for 26 years.

Don Campbell / HP staff

Emergency life rings are located along the pier in South Haven.

Don Campbell / HP file photo

Beachgoers enjoy a sunny day on June 24 at Silver Beach in St. Joseph.

By JULIE NEWELL and LAUREN RICE
SH Tribune Editor and HP Staff Writer

SOUTH HAVEN — More than two decades after South Haven ended it's lifeguard program, the city is now taking steps to resuscitate it.

The city's lifeguard program had been active from the late 1930s until it was terminated in 2001.

However, at the South Haven City Council meeting on April 7, U.S. Lifesaving Association National Certification Committee Chair Chris Brewster gave an aquatic safety assessment and recommendation report to city leadership. According to the report, there have been 12 drowning deaths in South Haven since the program ended.

South Haven resident Mike Vidmar served as a city lifeguard, head lifeguard and program supervisor for 26 years. During that time, he recalled there being three reported drowning deaths in guarded areas with one due to a cardiac arrest.

"If you are doing your job right and you're preventing a situation from occurring in the water, then you have relatively few rescues," Vidmar said.

With South Haven's former program, he said there were six guards in total who worked on rotating schedules. Each lifeguard had one day off a week that did not include weekends. Each person would work a six-hour shift with an hour break – unless there were weather-related issues or busy holiday weekends that would extend their shifts.

"There were three guards on each beach," Vidmar said in reference to the North and South beaches. "One of the three guards was identified as a head guard for that beach and would make ... any kind of executive decisions that had to be made."

Executive decisions could include deciding what color flag to put up and handling issues with beachgoers.

"The whole idea of being a lifeguard is to try to do things from a preventative standpoint, to interact with the people and interact with the water and the people connected in a way that would keep you from having to do anything of a rescue nature as a preventative maintenance kind of thing," Vidmar said. "You would try to prevent things from going wrong and to the extent that you could, that was great."

Some of the responsibilities of the lifeguards included watching the water, interacting with people, dealing with beach safety situations and maintenance.

"Some of the hardest things were when you had a red flag day and people weren't allowed in because you'd be continually running back and forth, up and down the beach explaining to people why today they couldn't swim and that was difficult," Vidmar recalled. "It's a potential for a conflict interaction with people who, you know, they're from Georgia or something and 'by golly we're on vacation and we're going to swim no matter what' kind of thing."

All South Haven lifeguards had to go through some form of training classes, which was usually through the Red Cross lifeguarding training program.

Sean Russell served as a South Haven lifeguard on and off between his junior and senior year of high school, from the summer of 1989 through the summer of 2000. He took over the program in 1998 and was the last person to run the lifeguard program before it was shuttered.

"It was all very much a growing and mentoring type of program, so it wasn't like you got through all that training and whatnot and you were selected to be a lifeguard – and then they threw you out on the beach," Russell said. "You very much then mentored under a senior lifeguard before they would even let you do anything on your own. You were out there for several weeks with another guard, just learning the ropes."

Russell said his favorite part about being a lifeguard was the responsibility and ability to grow into such an important job.

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Michigan expands program to help jailed people obtain identification documents to ease transition

By JANELLE D. JAMES
Bridge Michigan

Michigan is helping people who were detained at the Wayne County jail obtain driver's licenses or state identification cards, a move advocates say will increase the odds they land on their feet as they return to society.

It's an expansion of a program Michigan Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson first launched at state prisons in 2020 and more recently expanded to jails in Kent, Ingham, Genesee and Washtenaw counties.

"People deserve to be able to move forward after serving their time. Having an ID is a critical first step," Benson said in a press conference. "You need an ID to apply for a job. You need an ID for housing. You need an ID to enroll in education and training programs."

To date, the program has helped roughly 20,000 people who were incarcerated get a driver's license or state ID upon their release, according to Benson's office.

The jail in Wayne County, the state's largest county, typically holds between 1,300 and 1,500 people on any given day. About 60 percent of the people incarcerated there last week did not have a valid state ID, according to Sheriff Raphael Washington.

"We're looking forward to changing that," he told reporters at the press conference.

Experts say identification is often a first step toward stability, which in turn lowers the chances of recidivism, or committing another crime.

A study published by the National Library of Medicine found that one in four people on probation started without stable housing. Even among those with housing, many relied on family or friends. More than half ended up back in the system, often due to drug- or property-related arrests.

Families feel less burdened when their loved ones come home with those documents, because without them, they're far more likely to end up back in the system, said Hakim Crampton, government legislative liaison for the Citizens for Prison Reform.

"If they're not able to get vital documents, for example, that … reduces their chance for success but

See **ID**, page A3

Van Buren library expands services with internet program

By TRIBUNE STAFF

DECATUR — The Van Buren District Library is closing the digital divide in Southwest Michigan through its Mobile Internet Hotspot lending program in partnership with Mobile Beacon, a nonprofit provider of cellular broadband internet services.

Since launching in early 2022, the program has empowered library patrons across Van Buren County to access high-speed internet from home, school, or on the go, no matter where they live. According to a news release, this service has become a lifeline for many in a rural region where broadband access is often unreliable or unavailable.

"Many of our residents are low-income and lack affordable broadband at home," Covert Township Supervisor Daywi Cook said. "The library's innovative mobile hotspot lending program – one of the largest and most impactful in the nation – has been transformative."

In just the first half of 2025, the library's 420 hotspot devices provided patrons with more than 312,000 gigabytes of data, which is 45 times the national average and nearly 100 times the median usage within Mobile Beacon's network.

"When we started this program back in 2022, we were simply trying to serve the community," Van Buren District Library's Executive Director Dan Hutchins said in the release. "It never entered my mind that it was even possible a rural library system such as ours could exceed the data distribution of Mobile Beacon's large, urban library clients. I'm astonished."

During the summer months between May and July, community members used more than 149,000 GB of data, an indicator of how vital the program has become.

Mobile Beacon, which is based in Johnston, R.I., provides affordable, reliable, high-speed internet access to schools, libraries, nonprofits and health care organizations, enabling them to expand digital access and inclusion, and fostering stronger, more connected communities.

"Van Buren District Library is the clear leader among our partners," Mobile Beacon Director of Programs Joe Gleason said in the release. "Their program demonstrates what is possible when a library invests deeply in digital inclusion and puts equitable access at the center of its mission."

Each hotspot device averages 109 GB per month,

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The Tribune: Celebrating Our 126th Year

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LIFEGUARDS

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"It was life-changing for me as far as exposing me to that kind of a leadership role and the responsibilities, the maturity obviously, that I had to grow into," Russell said. "And then, of course just being able to help people."

He said several of the lifeguards at the time had shown an interest in eventually working in the fire department and he ended up going into the military.

"I think it was definitely a steppingstone for me to realize that I enjoyed that kind of job and the autonomy of making decisions and just being so impactful with that kind of job," Russell said.

Russell and Vidmar agreed the job had its difficulties.

"The whole idea is you're supposed to be doing stuff in a way to prevent the rescue," Vidmar said. "I used to tell myself, and I used to tell the guards, if you have a rescue, now you got to tell me what you did wrong. Yeah, you saved the person, that's no problem, that's expected ... what went wrong in that why did you have to have a rescue in the first place?"

Russell said it was also difficult to be focused for the entire six-hour shift.

"Ninety-nine percent of the time nothing is going to go wrong, but when it does, it usually happens quick and it can be very insidious," Russell said. "You don't really realize unless you're paying a lot of attention and have been trained to focus on what to look for."

He said a big part of the job was educating people about the dangers of the lake.

"That's probably why I'm so pro lifeguard," Russell said. "I saw what a difference we were able to make with people that just didn't understand and we were able to take the time and educate them because we had the knowledge, we had the experience and we had many, many hours on the beach to see how things could go wrong."

By the end of the program, Russell said the yearly cost for it to run was $80,000.

Don Campbell / HP staff

Mike Vidmar worked as a lifeguard at South Beach in South Haven for 26 years.

Berrien County beaches

At Silver Beach County Park, the lifeguard system has been in place almost as long as the beach has been a county park since the mid-1990s.

Berrien County Parks Director Jill Adams said her department recruits year-round to find enough qualified people to staff the beach seven days a week during the summer.

In previous years, that has been 12-14 lifeguards. This past summer it was 19, including one head guard and two assistant head guards. Adams said having more lifeguards makes it easy to work around schedules and ensure the towers are staffed every day.

"We do have to work with the team that we have," she said. "If we're going to put the lifeguard team in the towers we have to have enough of them to do so safely."

There are three lifeguard towers covering about 1,600 feet of designated swim zone on the beachfront. Adams said those towers are staffed every day from early June until mid-August.

The people employed as lifeguards, she said, tend to be in high school or college so the start date depends on when they're available and done with school for the summer.

The county budgeted about $65,000 for lifeguard services on Silver Beach last year, which covers salaries, supplies, training, communication devices and reimbursements for lifeguards who pay for their certification courses, Adams said.

"For the Silver Beach County Park lifeguards, the funding comes from parking fees and rental fees at our park," she said.

This summer, lifeguards on Silver Beach provided 130 first-aid assists, 64 returns of lost children and two in-water assists.

"The goal is always to try and have enough trained and eligible guards to be in the stands seven days a week," Adams said. "Most years there's a challenge finding enough guards that are qualified to work, but we've been very lucky with the team members that we've had."

New Buffalo restarted its lifeguard program with one person on staff in 2019, which has since grown over time to reach 12 lifeguards this past summer.

Parks Director Kristen D'Amico said New Buffalo has also bought equipment over the years, including a jet ski, rescue boards, a kayak, an EMILY (emergency integrated lifesaving lanyard) device and two lifeguard towers.

"Every season we would add on equipment as we needed it, because we didn't have it in the budget to just completely buy everything all at once," she said. "... There is a definite need for lifeguards on our beach, they do make a difference and I'm glad we have them."

Last year's budget was $70,000, but D'Amico said she may have gone over, and is interested in making room for more lifeguards because the beach in the southern part of Berrien County has become extremely busy.

The 800-foot-long beach had up to 2,000 people on it during crowded days this summer. She said the lifeguards are important because there are four currents with the potential to affect the beach conditions: a harbor current, structural current, longshore current and rip current.

"On a really bad day, you can experience all four of those out there," D'Amico said. "This summer alone, there was a weekend where we had like 14 saves because the currents were so bad."

She emphasized that her lifeguard program wasn't built in a day, and it's still growing. Next summer, the goal is to hire three additional lifeguards on staff.

"A lot of my lifeguards have been with me for five years or better, so they're highly trained, highly skilled," D'Amico said. "... Because my head lifeguard is a swim coach at Bridgman, we're working on a junior lifeguard program for next summer so that we can start getting kids that way interested in lifeguarding."

South Haven looking ahead

During a Sept. 13 workshop held at the Northside Marina, Double Haul Solutions Founder and CEO Nate Geinzer led a presentation for the South Haven City Council that showed the progress they have made – including a possible projected timeline and options for funding a city-run lifeguard program.

Huntington Beach Fire Chief Scott Haberle discussed a possible phased pathway for building a sustainable and scalable lifeguard program, as well.

Under his projections, the program could start in three phases and be implemented by 2030. The first phase would take place in the 2026 and 2027 summer seasons and begin with staffing South Beach only.

During the discussion, Geinzer gave a projected range of $200,000 to $500,000 for the possible total cost of the lifeguard program. However, those dollar figures are subject to staffing which would be under consideration by the city.

Geinzer also gave possible funding options in his presentation, which included parking fees, sponsorships, a special millage and eliminating services and capital investments.

Contact: lrice@TheHP.com, 932-0360

VOLUNTEER
TO RAKE
NOV. 13TH
In Berrien, Cass & Van Buren counties
On Thursday, November 13, thousands of volunteers across Berrien, Cass, and Van Buren counties will come together to help local seniors by raking leaves, bagging them, and cleaning gutters. Rake A Difference is a day dedicated to serving seniors age 60 and older who are physically unable to do their own yard work and cannot afford paid services.
Volunteer teams must sign up by October 17
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El Nopal brings Mexican flavors to SH

By TRIBUNE STAFF

SOUTH HAVEN — El Nopal Mexican Grill & Bar, located at 261 73rd, recently opened its doors, offering a full menu of traditional Mexican favorites.

According to a news release, El Nopal was recently welcomed as a new member of the South Haven Area Chamber of Commerce with a ribbon-cutting ceremony.

"El Nopal offers an authentic Mexican dining experience that blends traditional flavors with a modern, welcoming atmosphere," the release stated.

Photo provided

El Nopal Mexican Grill & Bar was recently welcomed as a new member of the South Haven Area Chamber of Commerce with a ribbon-cutting ceremony.

Owned and operated by the same team behind Los Ranchos Mexican Bar & Grill, El Nopal brings their years of experience and passion for Mexican cuisine to South Haven, creating a space where families, friends, and visitors can gather over flavorful meals and refreshing drinks."

El Nopal offers a variety of options including breakfast from 8 a.m. to 11 a.m. that features huevos rancheros and the Jalisco Omelette.

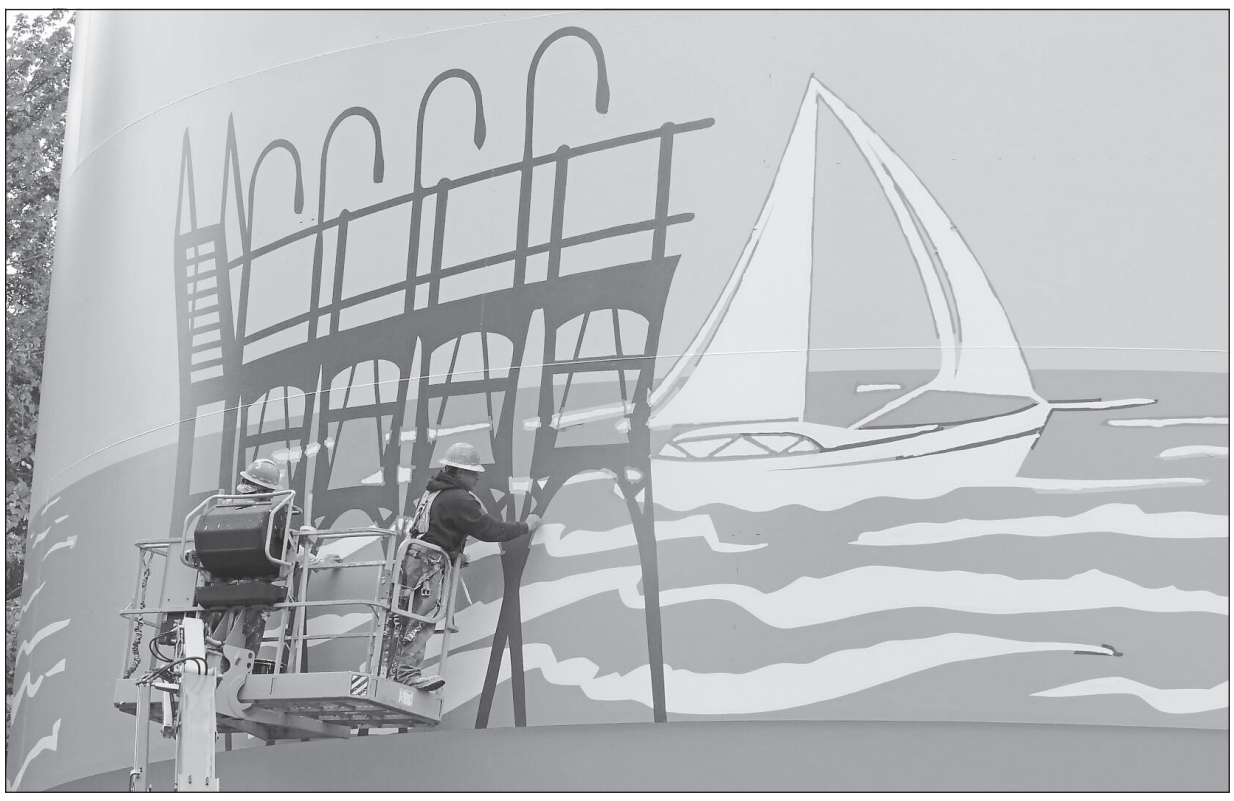
Throughout the day, diners can enjoy a wide variety of Mexican specialties; from tacos and enchiladas to chef-crafted entrées that highlight bold spices and fresh ingredients.

"The restaurant also offers a full bar with cocktails and signature margaritas, making it an ideal spot not only for meals but also for celebrating special occasions or enjoying a casual evening out," the release stated.

El Nopal Mexican Grill & Bar is open daily.

For more information, including hours and menus, go to www.elnopalsh.com.

WATER TANK MURAL



Photos provided / Tom Renner

Workers put the final coats of paint on the new South Haven water storage tank on Thursday morning before it will be raised onto the concrete pedestal.

The new million-gallon water tank will feature a wrap-around mural of a wavy Lake Michigan and South Haven's historic lighthouse.

The million gallon water storage tank currently under construction in South Haven will provide water service to approximately 5,000 properties in the area served by the South Haven Area Water-Sewer Authority.

OBITUARY

Bobbie Hirko

Bobbie Jean "Buff" Hirko (Glover), 84, died on Sept. 21, 2025, after a long bout with dementia.

An avid Michigan State Spartan fan and world traveler, Buff had a history surrounded by books.

She started her education at Michigan State University and became a lifelong librarian after earning her bachelor's and master's degrees in Japanese studies and library science, respectively, from the University of California at Berkeley. Her career included stints in technology (AdLib) and libraries (Fairfield, Calif. and Geilenkirchen, Germany) before hitting her stride melding the two for the State of Washington, entertaining speaking engagements nationwide in person and on television.

Buff loved British mystery novels and traveled to London often. She attended Bouchercon mystery writer conferences for many years, inspiring her to write two books, "Deep Water" and "Cold Storage." Another of her passions was World War II history.

Buff was raised in the coastal town of South Haven, Mich., by her grandparents, Benjamin and Mabel Clark.

Her world travels included fondness of her time living and raising her children in the Netherlands. Later in life, she was a global explorer, with trips to the Beijing Olympics, Bulgaria, Iceland, Machu Picchu (Peru), New Zealand and the Galapagos and Easter Islands.

Buff also enjoyed her MSU Spartans, traveling to many football and basketball contests over the years – including two winning Rose Bowls.

She eventually settled in her self-designed cabin, the "Inkpad", at Lake Dawn on the border of Olympic National Park in Port Angeles, Wash. in her final years.

Buff is survived by her identical twin sons, Rhett Brian Hirko of Menifee, California and Scott Roy Hirko of Lansing, Mich. and her two grandchildren, Sierra Hirko of Boston, Mass. and Sage Hirko of East Lansing, Mich. Her quick wit and sharpness of mind will be missed by all.

A remembrance gathering is planned for Nov. 8 in Port Angeles, Wash. Email hirkobuff@gmail.com for details.

Donations accepted for the Port Angeles Friends of the Library in her name – contact via friendsofthelibrarypa.org.

Indivisible Paw Paw campaigns against budget bill cuts

By TRIBUNE STAFF

PAW PAW — The Michigan House Legislature recently pushed through a budget bill that slashes $5 billion in essential services, including $4 billion in cuts to the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services.

According to a news release, the Republican-led House budget bill passed in August makes $5 billion in cuts to essential services, including a $4 billion cut to the Department of Health and Human Services (mainly Medicaid and behavioral health), $1.4 billion in cuts to education, a $200 million cut to environment, Great Lakes and energy, and a $94.7 million cut to public safety.

The bill is currently being negotiated, with an Oct. 1 deadline.

"A key selling point for pushing these cuts through is an increase in funding for roads," Indivisible Paw Paw Member Anne Hawkinson said in the release.

Indivisible Paw Paw, the non-partisan grassroots organization fighting for an inclusive democracy, recently started a letter and phone campaign for Michigan residents to voice their opposition to the cuts.

"The campaign is targeting key officials involved in the budget process who are effective people to influence," the release stated.

Residents can find editable templates on the group's website for four key areas of the cuts including: health and human services, education, environment, Great Lakes and energy and public safety.

The templates summarize the details of the cuts and include relevant data to help residents understand how these cuts affect each area.

"People can choose the template that they feel most passionate about, or use more than one if they are ambitious," Hawkinson said in the release. "The most effective letters and phone calls are those with some personalization, so we are asking writers to add a paragraph to their template introducing themselves."

The proposed budget bill now enters negotiations by a team that includes lawmakers from the House and Senate.

If an agreement isn't reached by Oct. 1, there is the potential for a state shutdown.

For more information and access to the templates go to www.indivisibleswm.org/influence.

ID

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increases their likelihood for recidivating," he said.

Michigan's current recidivism rate stands at 21 percent – the lowest rate on record, according to the state Department of Corrections, which has partnered with Benson to provide IDs to people leaving state prisons.

Those IDs reduce "some of the psychological burden that comes with reintegration back into society by simply taking a couple things off the plate, that didn't need to be on there to begin with," said Adam Grant, chief executive officer of Brighter Way, an organization that helps formerly incarcerated individuals reenter society in Washtenaw, Ingham and Jackson counties.

Not only does having proper identification help recently released individuals get a job and housing, but it also ensures that they are able to vote.

In Michigan, anyone with a felony or misdemeanor conviction can register to vote as long as they're not currently serving time in jail or prison. People held before trial or sentencing are also eligible to register.

Michigan is one of at least 17 states to provide identification at reentry, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures.

The Michigan Legislature last year gave final approval to a bill that would have written the state's current program into law by requiring the Department of Corrections to apply for an ID or license on behalf of people set for release.

Gov. Gretchen Whitmer vetoed those bills on technical grounds, however, saying they were written in a way that would have inadvertently undone other recent changes to state law.

In her veto letter, Whitmer told lawmakers she " fully supports " the underlying policy. "I look forward to working with the current Legislature on passing this important criminal justice reform issue in the near future."

LIBRARY

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surpassing national usage trends. The popularity and reach of the program earned VBDL recognition as Mobile Beacon's top-performing library partner of 2025, outpacing more than 1,800 other libraries in the country that offer similar services.

The Van Buren District Library is based in Decatur and serves Van Buren County from its seven locations in Bangor, Bloomingdale, Covert, Decatur, Gobles, Lawrence and Mattawan.

MSHDA
MICHIGAN STATE HOUSING DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY

September 25, 2025

PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD FOR THE DRAFT MICHIGAN CONSOLIDATED ACTION PLAN EVALUATION REPORT

Prior to submission of the Michigan Consolidated Action Plan Evaluation Report (CAPER) to the Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Office of Community Planning and Development, Michigan is required to publish the document for public review and comment. The Consolidated Plan proposes an action strategy by which those needs will be addressed, and the CAPER reflects activities undertaken between July 1, 2024 - June 30, 2025. The annual action plans are funded by five formula programs covered in the Michigan Consolidated Plan (HOME, Community Development Block Grant, Housing Opportunities for Persons with AIDs, the Emergency Solutions Grant, and the Housing Trust Fund). The Michigan State Housing Development Authority (MSHDA) is responsible for preparing the Michigan CAPER and soliciting comments from the public regarding the outcomes tied to the plan on an annual basis.

The comment period will commence on September 25, 2025 and end on October 9, 2025. The primary focus of the comment period is to receive comments regarding the draft CAPER report.

Copies of the CAPER report may be downloaded free of charge from the MSHDA website at www.michigan.gov/mshda.

All interested parties are invited to submit written comments to the attention of Tonya Young, 735 East Michigan Avenue, P.O. Box 30044, Lansing, MI 48909. Written comments must be received no later than October 9, 2025. Comments can also be submitted electronically to mshda-ndd@michigan.gov attention MSHDA Consolidated Plan Coordinator.

Special Assistance: Feedback is encouraged from mobility challenged individuals. Persons with disabilities needing accommodations for effective participation should contact the Housing Development Division at 517.335.2524 to request mobility, visual, hearing or other assistance.

Equal Opportunity Lender

Nourishing a community

Nutrition Exchange Program kicks off, aims to feed Berrien

By LAUREN RICE
For the Tribune

Linda Tinsley, executive director of Meals on Wheels of Southwest Michigan, talks about the creation of the Nutrition Exchange Program of Southwest Michigan during a news conference held Wednesday at the visitor's center of the Cook Nuclear Power Plant.

Photos by Tony Wittkowski / HP staff

Lt. Mario Bledsoe with the Salvation Army of Benton Harbor talks about how the Nutrition Exchange Program of Southwest Michigan will help area residents and farmers during a news conference held Wednesday at Cook Nuclear Power Plant.

Rows of gift baskets filled with locally grown produce was on display and handed out during a news conference held Wednesday at Cook Nuclear Power Plant.

Kelly Ferneau, AEP executive vice president and chief nuclear officer hands a $200,000 check over to Linda Tinsley, executive director of Meals on Wheels of Southwest Michigan, to kickoff the Nutrition Exchange Program of Southwest Michigan during a news conference held Wednesday at Cook Nuclear Power Plant.

BRIDGMAN — Community leaders are using a grant from the Cook Plant Foundation to unite local farms with community hunger-fighting resources to address food insecurity in Berrien County.

The Nutrition Exchange Program of Southwest Michigan is kicking off what Linda Tinsley, executive director of Meals on Wheels of Southwest Michigan, said is a pilot year to build connections, collect data and construct the foundation of the program for future years.

"The nutrition exchange of Southwest Michigan ... is a new regional network, bringing together food pantries, congregate meal sites, home-delivered meal programs and our local farms under one coordinated system," she said during a news conference held Wednesday at the visitor's center at the Cook Nuclear Power Plant in Bridgman. "Through monthly collaboration, a shared produce fund and centralized storage and transport, the exchange makes local sourcing sustainable."

The development of the program is a collaboration of area organizations, which includes the Berrien Community Foundation and SBG Health Strategies. Using a $200,000 grant from the Cook Plant Foundation, BCF President Lisa Cripps-Downey said the goal is to simultaneously fight hunger and support local farmers.

"It is a powerful network of ... health care providers and farmers and food pantries and community leaders who are working together to build a food system that nourishes people and it nourishes possibility," she said. "At the same time, we can create new revenue streams and deeper community engagement for our hardworking farmers and ranchers, who we all know are the cornerstone of community wellness."

The challenge of hunger and food insecurity in Berrien County, Cripps-Downey said, is not just about food.

"It's about health and stability and the chance for every person to live well," she said. "But we know that every one across our community faces really difficult choices. They can be choosing between groceries and medication. Between a meal and paying the bills."

The quality of the food being shared with people is also important to consider.

Dr. Sarah Gendernalik, founder and principal consultant of SBG Health Strategies, said the highly-processed foods – which are often the most accessible – drive health conditions like diabetes, heart disease and high blood pressure.

"What ends up on our plates is shaped by many factors ... but most critically, it's shaped by the food environment we live in," she said. "In too many neighborhoods, the foods that are easiest to find and afford are also the least supportive of long-term health. This network is about moving beyond calories alone and ensuring the food that reaches pantries, senior meal sites and home-delivered meal programs is nutrient-dense."

Taking away barriers

Lt. Mario Bledsoe with the Salvation Army of Benton Harbor said it can be heartbreaking to know what the community needs and not always be able to provide it.

The requests he gets most are for fresh foods, but they can be difficult to attain, maintain and keep in stock.

"We are grateful for every bit of help that brings us closer to meeting those needs," Bledsoe said. "Together, we can do so much. I believe if we put all our pennies together and make one big quarter, we can do this thing together. For too long, pantries have operated in isolation, doing the best we can for what we have."

Those healthy foods people ask for are also what Sarah Jollay, co-owner of Jollay Orchards in Coloma, said farmers want to provide to their community.

"I do think this is an opportunity to do what growers have always wanted to do, which is get healthy food into their community and have it be a part of everybody's everyday, not just somebody who stops by on a weekend to go for a hayride," she said. "This opportunity with the network will create the connectivity that we, in the agricultural community, have been looking for to take away the barriers of that distribution."

Gendernalik said there are currently about 27 food pantries in Berrien County serving upwards of 4,500 households every month. For the first year of the program, she said the goal is to include 12 pantries, move 50,000 pounds of produce to those pantries and develop relationships with at least six farms.

This year will also include the unveiling of a nutrition education system within the food pantry network and the process of determining funding sources for future years of the program.

"This is a kickoff – this is a launching point," Gendernalik said. "We want to make this work sustainable. We want it to grow beyond where we're starting."

Macomb County Clerk Anthony Forlini to run for Michigan secretary of state

By CRAIG MAUGER
The Detroit News (TNS)

LANSING — Macomb County Clerk Anthony Forlini, the chief election official in Michigan's third largest county, will seek the Republican nomination for secretary of state next year.

Forlini, 63, of Harrison Township, announced his campaign Wednesday morning, six months before GOP delegates will meet to endorse a candidate for the position. Forlini said he felt a call to duty to run and hoped to "get things straightened out at the state level."

"Michigan citizens want to know their vote counts and that the process is run with transparency, credibility and accountability," Forlini said in a statement. "They want their licenses renewed in a timely manner. They want to know that someone who leads the Bureau of Elections is committed to the rule of law, due process and someone who knows how to make government work for them.

"I am their man."

Forlini is in his second term as Macomb County's clerk – he was first elected to the post in 2020 – and is a former state representative.

He has the most experience in elected office of the four current GOP candidates for secretary of state. The other Republican contenders are businesswoman and activist Monica Yatooma of Commerce Township, Amanda Love of Clarkston and Timothy Smith of Fruitport.

Republicans have scheduled their endorsement convention for March 28 to select nominees for secretary of state, attorney general and education boards.

Michigan's current secretary of state, Democrat Jocelyn Benson, can't run again in 2026 because of term limits. She won her second term in 2022, defeating Republican Kristina Karamo by 14 percentage points 56%-42 percent.

Three Democratic candidates are campaigning for their party's secretary of state nomination next year: Ingham County Clerk Barb Byrum of Onondaga, Deputy Secretary of State Aghogho Edevbie of Detroit and former state Sen. Adam Hollier of Detroit.

Along with launching his campaign Wednesday, Forlini said he had received the endorsement of Republican former Secretary of State Candice Miller, who held the position from 1993-2002. Miller now serves with Forlini in county government as Macomb County's public works commissioner.

Forlini's announcement said he had trained more than 700 elector workers, had mandated watermarked ballots and had removed "hundreds of dead people" from voting rolls. In 2022, as a security precaution, Forlini decided to require local clerks to physically bring tabulator memory sticks to a central location to transmit results, rather than allowing the use of modems.

In an interview, Forlini noted that he finished in third place, with 14 percent as a write-in candidate, in the Mackinac Republican Leadership Conference's straw poll for secretary of state over the weekend, despite the fact his name wasn't listed on the ballot because he hadn't joined the race yet. Yatooma won with 39 percent.

Forlini said his total as a write-in showed Republicans want a candidate with experience.

Gov. Whitmer: Republican push to send National Guard into Detroit 'unwarranted'

By CRAIG MAUGER
The Detroit News (TNS)

LANSING — Democratic Gov. Gretchen Whitmer rejected Monday suggestions from some Republicans that President Donald Trump should send the National Guard to Detroit in a bid to lower the crime rate in Michigan's largest city.

During a press conference in Kentwood, Whitmer was asked about Republican Vice President JD Vance offering to ship troops to Detroit.

"I think that those tactics are unwarranted and not something that we're going to be asking (for)," Whitmer said, according to a video from west Michigan's WWMT-TV.

Whitmer made the comments during an appearance that focused on the state budget at Hamilton Early Childhood Center in Kentwood. The Detroit News was not invited to the event.

Trump deployed National Guard troops to Washington, D.C., in August and declared a " crime emergency " there. He also signed an order directing the National Guard to Memphis.

"The city of Memphis, Tennessee, is suffering from tremendous levels of violent crime that have overwhelmed its local government's ability to respond effectively," Trump said in a memo on Sept. 15. "This situation has become dire in one of our nation's most historic cities."

Then, during a rally in Livingston County on Sept. 17, Vance referenced the idea of sending the National Guard to Detroit. Republican U.S. Senate candidate Mike Rogers of White Lake Township has publicly urged Detroit Mayor Mike Duggan to ask Trump for federal help to "Make Detroit Safe Again."

"Gretchen, we are happy to send the National Guard to Detroit, Michigan," Vance said, referencing the governor by her first name.

Vance added: "Part of making this country work for you all is making sure you're safe in your communities and safe in your streets."

Detroit had the second-highest violent crime rate among major U.S. cities in 2024, ranking behind only Memphis.

Asked about troops potentially coming to Detroit, a spokesman for Duggan noted the city has seen significant declines in violent crimes in recent years, including to the lowest number of homicides in nearly 60 years.

In 2024, Detroit's law enforcement strategy produced record declines and resulted in the fewest homicides, shootings, and carjackings since 1965, Duggan spokesman John Roach said Wednesday. So far this year, the city is experiencing a further 15 percent drop in homicides, 25 percent decline in shootings, and 30 percent plunge in carjackings, all record lows, he said.

"The current partnership between federal, state, county, and private violence prevention groups is achieving record reductions, and it would be a serious mistake to abandon this successful strategy," Roach said.

Anti-abortion group pushes to flip open Mich. Senate seat

By MELISSA NANN BURKE
The Detroit News (TNS)

WASHINGTON — A national anti-abortion group, Susan B. Anthony Pro-Life America, announced Wednesday it's planning to spend $4.5 million on a push to flip Michigan's open U.S. Senate seat to Republican control.

Their message is that the Democratic Senate candidates are all abortion "extremists," aiming to reach 1 million voters by Election Day 2026 by persuading more moderate voters to turn out.

"They're no longer the party of safe, legal and rare. They're now the party of abortion at any point," said Kelsey Pritchard, the group's political communications director. "That's really how we've seen success in Michigan and in other states in the past few years."

The SBA campaign will feature a field campaign concentrating on Detroit, Lansing and Grand Rapids and targeting pro-life voters who don't consistently show up to vote in midterm elections, with a goal of reaching 1 million voters by Election Day 2026.

The anti-abortion group said it also will spend money on digital ads, direct mail and a "robust" campaign to turn out early voters next fall.

"We are already on the ground as of now, and starting to build that out. Reaching 1 million voters by Election Day is a pretty aggressive target, but given our track record in Michigan and the state program that we had there for last year's general election, we know we can meet that goal," Pritchard said.

SBA in Michigan partners with the Hillsdale College, a Christian school, to build out their teams.

The group is investing the same amount, $4.5 million, to reach 1 million voters in Georgia, where the goal is also to flip the Senate seat held by Democratic Sen. Jon Ossoff.

SBA also was involved in last year's Senate race in Michigan, as well as three U.S. House contests in Michigan's 3rd, 7th and 10th Districts, as part of a $92 million investment in eight battleground states last cycle.

In Michigan, the prominent Democratic candidates for Senate in 2026 are U.S. Rep. Haley Stevens of Birmingham, state Sen. Mallory McMorrow of Royal Oak and former public health official Abdul El-Sayed of Ann Arbor, all of whom support abortion rights and supported Michigan's 2022 Proposal 3, which enshrined the right to "reproductive freedom" in the state constitution.

Former U.S. Rep. Mike Rogers of White Lake Township is the presumptive Republican nominee who won President Donald Trump's backing over the summer. He also ran for the Senate last cycle, narrowly losing to Democrat Elissa Slotkin of Holly by about 19,000 votes.

Rogers had an anti-abortion record during his seven terms in Congress but shifted his position after launching his Senate campaign, saying he wouldn't support federal restrictions in Congress that are "inconsistent" with Michigan's 2022 constitutional amendment broadly protecting access to the procedure.

"I thought the decision should be made here. It was made here, and I'll abide by that decision in Washington, but I'll bet you can bet your bottom dollar we're going to find other ways for women to have a choice in what decision they want to make," Rogers said in a debate last year.

Rogers also said he supports access to abortion in cases of rape, incest and saving the mother's life. He opposes taxpayer funding for abortion and said that "choice" for women should also mean better access to options like adoption and prenatal care.

Asked about Rogers' positions not all aligning with SBA's, Pritchard said the group's keeping it's eye on the "big picture" of retaining and growing the Senate Republicans' majority.

"We want to continue the momentum in Michigan, where four Planned Parenthood have closed this year as Congress stopped the forced funding of Big Abortion in the One Big, Beautiful Bill," Pritchard said.

"That was for one year. So we're going to have that fight again after the midterms, and it's very important that Democrats don't win the Senate."

Slotkin attacked Rogers in ads on the issue and argued that voters shouldn't believe Rogers "changed 30 years of being unilaterally pro-life" and never breaking with his party on the issue.

Slotkin opposed the 2022 Supreme Court decision that overturned Roe v. Wade and has said that if a bill came before the Senate to codify Roe (which protected abortion access until the time of fetal viability at 22-24 weeks) she would vote for it.

South Haven Tribune

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CITY OF SOUTH HAVEN ALLEGAN AND VAN BUREN COUNTY, MICHIGAN ORDINANCE NO. 1101

AN ORDINANCE TO AMEND ARTICLE III OF CHAPTER 34 OF THE CITY OF SOUTH HAVEN CODE OF ORDINANCES

(The full language of this amendment is on file and available by request at the City Clerk's office, 539 Phoenix Street, South Haven, MI 49090)

Vibracoustic USA, Inc. has an opening for a Senior Material Development & Compliance Expert in South Haven, MI responsible for developing and optimizing the Rubber Compound Recipes in order to meet Customer and Internal Performance Request, to fulfil Environmental Legislation, to reduce cost. Bachelor's degree (or foreign academic equivalent) in Chemistry, Chemical Engineering, Material Science, or related degree field and Three (3) years in the job offered or a polymer related laboratory occupation, or other related position. This position requires international and domestic travel, as needed, up to 20%. Any applicant who is interested in this position should apply to job reference number 3835545 at https://jobs.freudenberg.com/Freudenberg/job/details/3835545/

Vibracoustic USA, Inc. has an opening for a Senior Application Engineer - Project Manager in South Haven, MI responsible for specifying the project target in agreement with the customer and the relevant experts. Bachelor's degree in Mechanical Engineering, Engineering Management, Industrial Engineering (or foreign academic equivalent) or a related degree field and Seven (7) years of experience as a Senior Application Engineer-Project Manager or a related Automotive Project Management and development occupation. This is a hybrid position following six months of full-time in person employment. International and Domestic travel, as needed, up to 50%. Any applicant who is interested in this position should apply to the job reference number 3835542 at https://jobs.freudenberg.com/Freudenberg/job/details/3835542/

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Hosted By:
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Cell: 269-214-2459
cindicomptonrealtor@gmail.com
513 Broadway Street, South Haven, MI 49090

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73733 Superior Street
South Haven, MI 49090

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Marie Bloomstine, REALTOR®
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SOUTH HAVEN COMMUNITY CALENDAR

Ongoing events

Visually impaired and blind persons support group meeting: Every third Wednesday of the month at 1 p.m. at Senior Services of Van Buren County.

Dementia and Alzheimer's caregivers support group meeting: Every third Wednesday of each month at 6 p.m. at Peace Evangelical Lutheran Church library.

Three Blondes Brewing: Trivia night on Thursdays at 7 p.m. and 8 p.m. and Sundays at 1 p.m. and 2 p.m.

Sparkle and Spice Boutique: Mom and Me play date. Fridays from 9-10 a.m.

South Haven Center for the Arts: Center Studio for adults from 6-8 p.m. on the first and third Wednesday of the month. Artists of any level can bring their own projects to work on. Basic art supplies will be available. Attendees must be 18 years old and over. Members are free, non-members cost $5.

South Haven Center for the Arts: Center Studio for ages 9 to 13 from 4-5:30 p.m. every Wednesday. Young artists are invited to create art at their own pace with an instructor to help guide as needed. Free workshop but a $10 donation is suggested to help cover cost of supplies.

South Haven Center for the Arts: "Altered Consumerism" exhibition from Aug. 8 through Sept. 20.

Candlelight Yoga: Thursdays at 7:30 p.m. at the Church of Epiphany. Cost is $15.

Food pantry: First Congregational Church open from 10 a.m. to noon on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. It is a drive-up food pantry.

Food pantry: Sacred Heart Catholic Church. For Bangor residents only. Open from 1-4 p.m. on Thursdays.

Food, clothing, baby pantry: Lily of the Valley Church in Covert. Open from noon to 2 p.m. on Wednesdays. Must call the central office to register.

Personal care and clothing pantry: First Assembly of God open from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Wednesdays. Must call the central office to register.

Baby pantry: Peace Lutheran Church open from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Monday through Friday. Must call the central office to register.

Baby pantry: Simpson United Methodist Church in Bangor. Open from 10 a.m. to noon on Tuesdays. Must call the central office to register.

South Haven Memorial Library: Story Time on 11 a.m. to noon on Tuesdays starting Sept. 2.

South Haven Farm Market: Saturdays from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. through October at Huron Street Pavilion.

HawksHead: Pasta on the Patio every Wednesday at 5 p.m.

Michigan Maritime Museum: Hands-on the Harbor every Thursday at 10:30 a.m.

Lake Arvesta: Summer at the pasture concert every Friday and Saturday at 6 p.m.

Liberty Hyde Bailey Museum: New Exhibit – "The Adventures of Liberty Hyde Bailey – Chicago: 1872." Available during museum hours: 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Wednesday through Saturday.

Liberty Hyde Bailey Museum: "Stepping Stones" by Carol Trembath and David W. Craig Storywalk. Available through Sept. 31.

Liberty Hyde Bailey Museum: "The Gift of Mnoomin" by Brittany Luby and Joshua Mangeshig Pawis-Steckley Storywalk. Available from Oct. 1 through 31.

Lakeside Social Bowling Alley: Glow Bowl every Friday from noon to 9 p.m.

September

27-28 – Hartford Fall Festival: From 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Saturday and from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Sunday at the Hartford Public Library.

28 – Gingerman Raceway: Track Night from 1:30 to 8:30 p.m.

29 – Soccer: Boys middle school against Black River Public School at North Shore Elementary School.

29 – Soccer: Boys junior varsity against Black River Public School at 5 p.m. at Ratcliffe Field.

29 – Soccer: Boys varsity against Black River Public School at 6:30 p.m. at Ratcliffe Field.

30 – Rotary Club: Art Ayers will present on Kenya Water Project.

October

1 – Soccer: Boys middle school against Watervliet at 5 p.m. at North Shore Elementary School.

1 – Soccer: Boys junior varsity against Rockford at 5 p.m. at Ratcliffe Field.

1 – Soccer: Boys varsity against Rockford at 6:30 p.m. at Ratcliffe Field.

1 – Volleyball: Middle school girls against Fennville at 5:30 p.m.

1 – South Haven Memorial Library: Hooked on Yarn from 1 to 3:30 p.m.

2 – Golf: Girls varsity at 9 a.m. at Hawkshead Links.

2 – Tennis: Boys varsity against Three Rivers at 4 p.m.

2 – Volleyball: Girls junior varsity against Lawton at 5:30 p.m.

2 – Volleyball: Girls freshman against Black River at 5:50 p.m.

2 – Volleyball: Girls varsity against Lawton at 6:30 p.m.

2 – Football: Boys junior varsity against Watervliet at 6 p.m. at Ratcliffe Field.

3 – South Haven Memorial Library: Play-doh play date at 11 a.m. Free event for preschoolers, siblings are welcome.

4 – Bumbleberry Acres: Princess, Superhero and Unicorn Day from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.

4 – DeGrandchamp Farms: Cranberry Harvest Days from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Take a trolley ride out to the bogs, view the packing facility, food tastings games and more.

Photo provided / Tom Renner

South Haven's Angel Barajas is challenged by Fennville player.

6 – Soccer: Boys middle school against Fennville at 5 p.m.

6 – Volleyball: Girls middle school against coloma at 5:30 p.m.

6 – Covert Branch Library: After school art workshop for grades 6 to 12 from 3 to 5 p.m.

7 – Rotary Club: Program TBD and Clark Gruber is program chair.

7 – Volleyball: Girls junior varsity against Fennville at 5:30 p.m.

7 – Volleyball: Girls freshman against Fennville at 5:30 p.m.

7 – Volleyball: Girls varsity against Fennville at 6:30 p.m.

9 – Volleyball: Girls varsity against Berrien Springs at 1 p.m.

9- Volleyball: Girls junior varsity against Berrien Springs at 2 p.m.

9 – Football: Boys junior varsity against Kalamazoo Christian at 6 p.m. at Ratcliffe Field.

9 – South Haven Young Professionals: monthly networking event from 5:30 to 6:30 p.m. a Gravity Winery.

10 – Bumbleberry Acres: Date Night on the Farm from 5:30 to 8 p.m. Adults only. $20 for individuals, $30 for couples.

10 – South Haven Memorial Library: Bevin Cohen will host teas, tinctures and oils craft event at 4 p.m. Learn how to make salves, balms and tinctures using local herbs.

11 – Bangor Community Fire Department: Touch a Truck from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

11 – DeGrandchamp Farms: Cranberry Harvest Days from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Take a trolley ride out to the bogs, view the packing facility, food tastings games and more.

13 – South Haven Memorial Library: Author event with Michigan author Mark Love at 6 p.m. Includes a discussion on his books, writing process, characters and a book signing.

13 – South Haven Garden Club: Making herbal smudges at First Congregational Church.

14 – Rotary Club: South Haven Superintendent Aleman-Putman will present and Dene Hadden is program chair.

14 – South Haven Memorial Library: South haven Strummers from 6 to 7:30 p.m. Bring your own ukulele.

14 – Swimming: Girls varsity against Plainwell at 6 p.m.

15 – South Haven Memorial Library: Hooked on Yarn from 1 to 3:30 p.m.

16 – Volleyball: Girls middle school against Bridgeman at 5:30 p.m.

17 – Football: Boys varsity against Allegan at 7 p.m. at Ratcliffe Field.

17 – South Haven Public Schools: Homecoming Golf Cart Parade at 5:30 p.m. Carts will line up at Black River Book Store.

17 – South Haven Memorial Library: Messy play Fridays for preschoolers from 11 a.m. -noon.

18 – South Haven Memorial Library: Halloween Party from 11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

19 – Scott Club: Jazz Pianist Xavier Davis presents "An Afternoon of Jazz." Free concert, RSVP required.

20 – Volleyball: Girls middle school against Saugatuck at 5:30 p.m.

21 – Evening meeting at the American Legion beginning at 5 p.m. Managing Director of the Van Buren County Road Commission Bret Witowski will present and Dan Thompson is the program chair.

24 – Football: Boys varsity against Galesburg-Augusta at 7 p.m. at Ratcliffe Field.

25 – South Haven Memorial Library: Astronomy Club at 11 a.m. Registration is recommended.

26 – Liberty Hyde Bailey Museum: Pumpkin Boo-Walk starting at 6:45 p.m.

28 – South Haven Young Professionals: Coffee Connections from 8:30 to 9:30 a.m. at The Flying Saucer.

28 – Rotary Club: Club Assembly and Rotary President Amy Nichols to present.

29 – South Haven Memorial Library: Hooked on Yarn from 1 to 3:30 p.m.

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Meet our Pets of the Week, Peach!
We have a special Pet of the Week this week. Peach is celebrating her 1st birthday!
True to her name, Peach is as sweet as they come! This 1 year old pup is all about cuddles, gentle tail wags, and playing a rousing game of fetch (bonus points if you cheer when she brings it back). She's got a soft soul, a big heart, and an adorable way of leaning into you when she's ready for snuggles.
Peach is still figuring out the world and may take a moment to warm up to new friends but once she does, she's all in. With a little patience and a lot of love, she'll be your loyal shadow and favorite nap buddy in no time.
Make Peach's birthday wish come true and submit an adoption application at Al-Van.org/adopt!
Peach
THIS WEEK'S WISH LIST
This Week's Wishlist Besides getting adopted, Peach has a special request for her birthday. Her and her canine friends are in need of large and extra-large hard chew toys like Kongs and Nylabone's. These toys are safe for them to have while in their kennels and can help reduce stress and keep their minds active while they wait for their furever homes.

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FOCUS

50 years ago, NASA sent 2 spacecraft to search for life on Mars – the Viking missions' findings are still discussed today

By JOEL S. LEVINE
Research Professor of Applied Science, William & Mary

Finding life beyond the Earth would be a major scientific discovery with significant implications for all areas of science and human thought. Yet, only one direct search for extraterrestrial life has ever been conducted.

The NASA Viking spacecraft, which landed on Mars, conducted this search in the summer of 1976. Viking consisted of two twin orbiters and landers, with experimental chambers in the landers to conduct three biology experiments.

Over the past half-century, the measurements made during the Viking biology experiments have been the subject of many discussions, analyses and speculation. Today, scientists are still discussing the results of these experiments in an attempt to answer the age-old question of whether there is life beyond the Earth.

The year 2025 marks 50 years since the two spacecraft launched, three weeks apart. These landers achieved humankind's first two successful soft landings of operational and functioning spacecraft on the surface of another planet.

I'm an atmospheric scientist who worked on the Viking missions in the 1970s at the NASA Langley Research Center, the laboratory that developed and managed the highly successful Viking missions. The Viking missions' scientific discoveries painted a new picture of Mars' atmosphere, surface and planetary history.

Launching and landing the Viking spacecraft

The two Viking spacecraft both consisted of an orbiter and a lander. Viking 1 entered Mars' orbit on June 19, 1976, and successfully landed on the surface on July 20, 1976, which was also the seventh anniversary of the first human Moon landing. Viking 2 followed, landing on Sept. 3, 1976, at a site farther to the northwest.

Viking wasn't just looking for life. These crafts contained equipment to take pictures; map heat energy, wind and weather; study the chemical composition of the surface, dust and atmosphere; and collect and analyze soil samples.

Measurements that Viking took of the atmosphere suggested that Mars used to have a much denser atmosphere but over time lost it. It also observed that the wind picks up tiny dust particles, blowing them into the atmosphere. This process colors the planet's sky permanently pink.

The Viking landers also discovered that at any location on Mars, the atmosphere's surface pressure varies seasonally. The planet has frozen north and south poles, like on Earth. At the Martian poles in summer, the frozen carbon dioxide sublimates – transforming from a frozen solid to a gas – and then at the winter pole condenses back into a frozen solid.

That process, unique to Mars, affects the atmospheric pressure by changing how much carbon dioxide is in gas form instead of solid form over the planet's surface.

Biology experiments

Each of the three Viking biology experiments brought a soil sample from the Martian surface into a sterilized test chamber and exposed the sample to a different nutrient under different atmospheric conditions.

Researchers wanted to find out whether the soil contained microorganisms, so they monitored how the atmosphere in the chamber changed. Metabolic processes – like breathing – from organisms consuming the nutrient would change the chemical composition of the chamber's atmosphere.

Depending on the experiment, the nutrient contained either carbon, carbon dioxide or carbon monoxide – all of which were radioactive. With radioactive samples, researchers could track the level of radioactivity in the chamber to see if metabolic reactions in the soil samples were raising or lowering it.

For all three experiments, the researchers could use radio commands to heat up the test chamber, which was still inside the Viking spacecraft on Mars. This would destroy any potential microorganisms in the soil and stop the production of any gases they were creating metabolically.

In the first experiment, called the carbon assimilation experiment or the pyrolytic release experiment, the researchers simulated the Martian atmosphere in one of Viking's test chambers. They filled the chamber with gases such as carbon dioxide and carbon monoxide and made these gases radioactive to see how the atmosphere changed from interactions with the soil sample.

In the second experiment, The labeled release experiment, researchers directly injected the soil sample with a nutrient containing radioactive carbon. They monitored the experimental chamber for radioactive carbon dioxide and measured the level of radioactive carbon dioxide after injecting the soil samples. In this experiment, the investigators saw results that could have come from a biological source.

The third experiment, the gas exchange experiment, filled the chamber with helium, which doesn't react with anything. They exposed the soil to different types of nutrients. Some had been incubating in wet conditions, others in humid conditions and others still in dry conditions.

Again they monitored the chamber for potential metabolically produced gases. When the soil samples touched the wet nutrient, the humidity immediately caused some changes in the chamber's chemical environment. Most of these changes were just caused by the water evaporating.

In one case, superoxides in the soil, which are O2 molecules that have taken on an extra electron, reacted with water. Other changes had to do with oxygen molecules in the soil breaking down. All of these changed the atmosphere in the chamber but likely wouldn't have been caused by microorganisms.

The researchers repeated this experiment by resetting the chamber's atmosphere and adding in fresh nutrients, but they didn't change the soil sample. This time, the soil released only carbon dioxide into the chamber, which likely came from the organic materials in the nutrient they added breaking down.

The results from this third experiment led the researchers to conclude that there likely weren't microorganisms in the soil. But together, the results from the three experiments weren't exactly straightforward.

Only the labeled release experiment results suggested a biological source for the observed results. The carbon assimilation experiment and the gas exchange experiment suggested that nonbiological or inorganic chemical reactions caused the observed results.

Lead researchers on the project concluded that there was no unambiguous discovery of life by the Viking landers, but it cannot be completely ruled out.

The molecular analysis experiment

Unlike the biology experiments, which experimented on soil samples, another Viking experiment, the molecular analysis experiment, directly searched the Martian surface for organic matter. Organic materials are carbon compounds bonded with hydrogen, oxygen or nitrogen that come either directly or indirectly from living organisms.

To everyone's surprise, this experiment did not detect any organic compounds on the surface of Mars. Researchers had known for years that meteorites containing organic materials had hit Mars repeatedly throughout its history, so to find none at all seemed strange.

Some scientists theorized that Martian soil might contain a compound that quickly converts any organic material on the surface to carbon dioxide. A compound like this would have evaporated any evidence before scientific instruments had the chance to find it.

In 2008, decades after this finding, NASA found a compound that may be doing just that. Their Phoenix lander detected high concentrations of a compound called perchlorate in the soil.

When perchlorate is heated – as it was in the Viking molecular analysis experiment – it can chemically destroy organic compounds, and scientists figured it's the likely culprit behind the strange result from the molecular analysis experiment.

A new model for life on Mars

Scientists are still using the findings from these experiments today. Recently, Steven A. Benner, the director of the Foundation for Applied Molecular Evolution, developed a new model for present-day life on Mars based on the three Viking biology experiments' measurements.

His model predicts that microorganisms could have used the radioactive carbon nutrient in the experiment chamber to create their own food, releasing radioactive carbon dioxide in the process. It also suggests that at night, microorganisms could be absorbing oxygen and expelling carbon dioxide. That could explain the oxygen released from the Mars soil sample when moistened.

The Benner model suggests that there could be living microorganisms on the surface of Mars, but future research and measurements will need to confirm this very intriguing possibility.

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buradaki / Getty Images

FOCUS

Where does your glass come from?

By AKI ISHIDA
Professor and Director, College of Architecture and Graduate School of Architecture and Urban Design

The word "local" has become synonymous with sustainability, whether it's food, clothes or the materials used to construct buildings. But while consumers can probably go to a local lumberyard to buy lumber from sustainably grown trees cut at nearby sawmills, no one asks for local glass.

If they did, it would be hard to give an answer.

The raw materials that go into glass – silica sand, soda ash and limestone – are natural, but the sources of those materials are rarely known to the buyer.

The process by which sand becomes sheets of glass is often far from transparent. The sand, which makes up over 70 percent of glass, could come from a faraway riverbed, lakeshore or inland limestone outcrop. Sand with at least 95 percent silica content is called silica sand, and only the purest is suitable for architectural glass production. Such sand is found in limited areas.

If the glass is colorless, its potential sources are even more limited, because colorless low-iron glass – popularized by Apple's flagship stores and luxury towers around the world – requires 99 percent pure silica sand.

Glass production in Venice

The mysteries of glass production have historic precedent that can be traced back to trade secrets of the Venetian Empire.

Venice, particularly the island of Murano, became the center for glass production largely due to its strategic location for importing raw materials and production know-how and exporting coveted glass objects.

From the 11th to the 16th centuries, the secrets of glassmaking were protected by the Venetians until three glassmakers were smuggled out by King Louis XIV of France, who applied the technology to create the Palace of Versailles' Hall of Mirrors.

Venice was an otherwise unlikely location for glassmaking.

Neither the primary materials of sand and soda ash (sodium carbonate) nor the firewood for the medieval Venetian glassmakers were found in the city's immediate vicinity. They were transported from the riverbeds of the Ticino River in Switzerland and the Agide River, which flows from the Austria-Switzerland border to the Adriatic Sea south of Venice. Soda ash, which is needed to lower the melting point of silica sand, was brought from Syria and Egypt.

So Venetian glass production was not local; it was dependent on precious resources imported from afar on ships.

THE CONVERSATION

Rising demand for low-iron, seamless glass

In the past few decades, low-iron glass, known for its colorlessness, has become the contemporary symbol of high-end architecture. The glass appears to disappear.

Low-iron glass is made from ultrapure sand that is low in iron oxide. Iron causes the green tint seen in ordinary glass. In architecture, low-iron glass doesn't affect the performance – only the appearance. But it is prized.

In the U.S., this type of sand is found in a few locations, primarily in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Illinois and Missouri, where sand as white and fine as sugar – thus called saccharoidal – is mined from St. Peter sandstone. Other locations where it can be found around the world include Queensland in Australia and parts of China. Less pure sand can be purified by methods such as acid washing or magnetic separation.

Perhaps no corporation has popularized low-iron and seamless glass in architecture more than the technology giant Apple.

Glass has become fundamentally linked with Apple's products and architecture, including its flagship stores' expensive and daring experiments in architectural uses of glass.

Apple's first showroom, completed in Soho in New York in 2002, showcased all-glass stairs that were strengthened with hurricane- and bullet-resistant plastic interlayers sandwiched between five sheets of glass. The treads attach to all glass walls with a hockey puck-size titanium hardware, making both the glass stairs and the shoppers appear to float.

The company's iconic flagship store near New York's Central Park is an all-glass cube measuring 32½ feet (10 meters) on each side and serving as a vestibule to the store below. The first version was completed in 2006 using 90 panels, which was a technical feat. Then, in 2011, Apple reconstructed the cube in the same location, same size, but with only 15 panels, minimizing the number of seams and hardware while maximizing transparency.

Today, low-iron glass has become the standard for high-profile architecture and those who can afford it, including the "pencil towers" in Manhattan's Billionaires' Row.

Glass's climate impact

Glass walls common in high-rise buildings today have other drawbacks. They help to heat up the room during increasingly hot summers and contribute to heat loss in winter, increasing dependence on artificial cooling and heating.

The glassmaking process is energy intensive and relies on nonrenewable resources.

To bring sand to its molten state, the furnace must be heated to over 2,700 degrees Fahrenheit (1,500 degrees Celisus) for as long as 50 hours, which requires burning fossil fuels such as natural gas, releasing greenhouse gases. Once heated to that temperature, the furnace runs 24/7 and is rarely shut down.

The soda ash and limestone also release carbon dioxide during melting. Moreover, glass production requires mining or producing nonrenewable natural resources such as sand, soda ash, lime and fuel. Transporting them further increases emissions.

Production and fabrication of extra-large glass panels rely on specialized equipment and occur only at a limited number of plants in the world, meaning transportation increases the carbon footprint.

Architectural glass is also difficult to recycle, largely due to the labor involved in separating glass from the building assembly.

Although glass is touted as infinitely recyclable, only 6 percent of architectural glass is downcycled into glass products that require less purity and precision, and almost none is recycled into architectural glass. The rest ends up in landfills.

The increasing demand for glass that is colorless, extra large and seamless contributes to glass's sustainability problem.

How can we make glass more sustainable?

There are ways to reduce glass's environmental footprint.

Researchers and companies are working on new types of glass that could lower its climate impact, such as using materials that lower the amount of heat necessary to make glass. Replacing natural gas, typically used in glassmaking, with less-polluting power sources can also reduce emissions.

Low-e coatings, a thin coat of silver sprayed onto a glass surface, can help reduce the amount of heat that reaches a building's interior by reflecting both the visible light and heat, but the coating can't fully eliminate solar heat gain.

People can also alter their standards and accept smaller and less ultraclear panels. Think of the green tint not as impure but natural.

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FOCUS

Photos by Myung J. Chun / Los Angeles Times / TNS

The BurnBot RX, shown Aug. 27 in Thousand Oaks, California, is a remote-controlled, prescribed-burn system that creates precise burns. The system is used to create fire breaks, fuel breaks and defensible space.

A *'Roomba for the forest'* could be SoCal's next wildfire weapon

By NOAH HAGGERTY
Los Angeles Times (TNS)

LOS ANGELES — The giant, remote-controlled vehicle – somewhere between a tractor trailer, a tank and a Zamboni in appearance – slowly rolled across the dry, brittle grass growing between the tangle of freeways making up the 101 and 23 interchange in Thousand Oaks.

Inside the beast, fire churned. And as it rolled over the land, that fire incinerated any brush it encountered, leaving only a thin smoke cloud billowing from the top of the machine, some flashes of orange and red from behind its metal skirt and, in its wake, a desolate, smoldering black line.

BurnBot isn't the fastest way to rid a landscape of dangerously flammable vegetation (it tops out at around 0.5 mph) but it can do something that traditional vegetation management techniques cannot: with almost surgical precision, it can kill the flammable brush sitting within feet of homes and highways on even the hottest and driest days and with virtually no safety risks or disruptions to daily life.

On a recent summer afternoon, as wildland firefighters maneuvered the machine and mopped up the charred earth on a stretch of highway about 30 miles west of Los Angeles on the 101, a who's who of SoCal's wildfire leadership looked on – from the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, local fire departments, Caltrans, the U.S. forest and park services, Southern California Edison and state Legislature. The sweet smoky smell of wildland fire permeated the hot midday air. The onlookers quietly took notes.

"We have to do everything we can to try to figure out ways to lower our wildfire risk in a psychologically friendly way – we don't want to just turn this beautiful environment into concrete," state Sen. Benjamin Allen (D-Santa Monica) told the crowd while standing atop BurnBot's metal skirt. "We're looking for innovative solutions, and I'm just glad to see this kind of work."

As humans ignite fires with increasing frequency in Southern California – and continue to build deeper into fire-prone areas – wildfire policymakers and scientists are racing to better understand how to manage the crisis.

Private investors are throwing millions of dollars at the problem, and consequently, a slew of entrepreneurs and former firefighters are trying their hand at developing high-tech solutions.

A demonstration of the BurnBot RX, a remote-controlled, prescribed-burn system, was held Aug. 27 in Thousand Oaks, California, showing how the machine can create precise fire breaks such as along the side of the road like at the 23 and 101 freeway transition.

Few of the emerging technologies – including BurnBot – have faced rigorous scientific scrutiny yet: Fire researchers in Southern California still haven't collected enough data to settle on which broad strategies are most effective, let alone which companies are best at carrying them out.

Nevertheless, BurnBot has caught the eyes of the departments and organizations spearheading wildfire mitigation in California.

"We're always looking at what new technologies there might be that we can utilize to enhance our vegetation management program," said Andrew Dowd, public information officer with the Ventura County Fire Department, which sent a small crew to check out the bot.

BurnBot is the brainchild of computer scientist Anukool Lakhina and physicist Waleed Haddad.

After the 2020 Northern California fires, the two put their heads together to develop a technology solution for the state's crisis. They settled on essentially a "Roomba for the forest" (as one onlooker at the August demonstration put it).

Haddad built a prototype of BurnBot in the kitchen of Lakhina's San Francisco home to convince fire scientists and investors that the idea might actually work. Its first meal: Lakhina's backyard.

The BurnBot RX uses propane and fans to burn a precise path under it. The remote-controlled system mitigates risks by creating fire breaks, fuel breaks and defensible space.

Today, the company has built five full-size BurnBots – called the RX, shorthand for the "prescribed" in "prescribed burn."

While the tech was developed and primarily tested in Northern California, Lakhina thinks it can help Southern California address its two unique wildfire risk-reduction goals: lower the number of ignitions and create strategic fuel breaks to slow fire and give firefighters access to the region's fire-prone wildlands.

BurnBot hopes to thwart human-started fires by removing flammable grasses along common ignition points, like roadways and power lines. Vehicles and electrical equipment have historically caused roughly 2 percent of fires in the region. Arson, unsupervised kids and various agriculture, construction and landscaping equipment have been responsible for the lion's share; however, even those are much more common along roadways and near developments, where BurnBot hopes to operate.

Currently, agencies such as Caltrans often rely on routine mowing to fight the flammable grasses along transportation corridors and in populated areas. But mowing doesn't completely destroy the grasses; it just gives them a haircut. Their seeds stay hidden underground, and the grasses grow back quickly.

Herbicides, another common technique for managing invasive grasses, are often expensive to purchase and can leave toxic chemicals in the environment after treatment.

Meanwhile, prescribed burns can cover a lot of ground and, if they burn hot enough, can destroy invasive seeds. However, traditional prescribed burns can require road closures for safety reasons, and fire crews typically only perform them in cooler, wetter conditions to limit the risk of a powerful, runaway fire.

BurnBot RX, however, can safely run any day, Lakhina said. Its most recent demo was Aug. 27, during peak fire season in sweltering 90-degree weather. The only traffic control was a few cones placed along the highway's shoulder. No road closures; no blocked lanes creating congestion.

The bot's handlers can also finely control the heat of the burn, ensuring the seeds of invasive plants hiding the soil get scorched too.

While the research evaluating BurnBot's success is limited right now, Lakhina said his company is working with Stanford researchers to evaluate how land recovers after a visit from BurnBot. So far, they've seen anecdotal evidence that after a burn, fire-resilient native species often return instead of invasive grasses.

The company plans to keep its five currently functioning BurnBot RXs in the family, where their experienced technicians and wildland firefighters will use them to complete wildfire risk reduction work across the state. In the coming years, they plan to aggressively grow the size of their operation. Lakhina said the company plans to build 15 next year and 50 the year after.

"Unlike other kinds of disasters, we have a lot of agency here: … Take out the fuels, reduce the risk," Lakhina said. "California has wildfires, but California also has innovators. Shame on us if we can't sort our way out of this."

HEALTH

The brain-heart connection: Mayo Clinic expert explains the powerful tie that works both ways

By MAYO CLINIC NEWS NETWORK (TNS)

ROCHESTER, Minn. — You may have heard of the mind-body connection: the broad concept that thoughts and feelings, especially those related to stress, can influence physical health. Mohamad Alkhouli, M.D., an interventional cardiologist at Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, is researching the relationship between the brain and the heart. Each can have a powerful impact on the other, Dr. Alkhouli explains.

"The mind-heart connection is part of the broader mind-body relationship, but it's uniquely powerful. Emotional states like anxiety, grief, or even joy can directly influence heart rhythms, blood pressure, and even the risk of heart attacks," Dr. Alkhouli says. "At the same time, the heart sends signals back to the brain through nerves, hormones, and pressure receptors – affecting our mood, attention, and stress levels. So, it's not just the brain talking to the heart; the heart talks back."

Conditions with a brain-heart connection include spontaneous coronary artery dissection (SCAD) and stress-induced cardiopathy (SICM), also known as broken heart syndrome. Both conditions can result from stress. Dr. Alkhouli has been part of Mayo Clinic research teams exploring aspects of each.

Broken heart syndrome often is sparked by stressful situations and extreme emotions; it briefly interrupts the way the heart pumps blood. People experiencing it may have sudden chest pain and think they're having a heart attack.

The tools typically used to screen for heart attacks cannot identify when broken heart syndrome is actually the cause of a patient's chest pain. In most cases, invasive coronary angiography is required to differentiate SICM from myocardial infarction due to coronary obstruction. Mayo research found that a novel technology called magnetocardiography, which measures magnetic fields generated by the heart, can help identify broken heart syndrome.

Another Mayo study suggests that SCAD, a type of heart attack that often results from physical or emotional stress, can be a secondary event instigated by broken heart syndrome.

In broken heart syndrome, the heart's temporary weakening doesn't happen evenly: Some parts of the heart fail to contract well, while others work harder to compensate, Dr. Alkhouli says. This uneven motion creates twisting forces on the heart muscle.

"Because the coronary arteries, the main blood vessels that supply blood to the heart, sit on top of the heart, they can be stretched or stressed at the junctions between these overactive and underactive areas during broken heart syndrome," he explains. "In some cases, this stress may cause a tear in the artery wall, what we call SCAD."

A question still to be answered is why some people develop broken heart syndrome after emotional trauma while others do not, Dr. Alkhouli notes.

Emotional stress also can increase the risk of other heart conditions, such as:

- High blood pressure, also known as hypertension.
- Heart disease.
- Atrial tachycardia.
- Bradycardia.

"What fascinates me most is how deeply intertwined our emotional and cardiovascular systems are, and how much we still don't understand," Dr. Alkhouli says. "Could we one day 'rewire' this connection for healing, using therapy, neuromodulation (alteration of nerve activity at targeted sites in the body by electrical or chemical means), or even digital tools? At Mayo Clinic, we're exploring these questions, and we're beginning to see the heart and brain not as separate organs, but as a single, dynamic network."

That network works in both directions. Dr. Alkhouli is part of Mayo's Heart Brain Clinic, where cardiologists and neurologists work together to evaluate patients who may have neurological symptoms that can be attributed to a cardiac event.

In these patients, the heart and brain are closely linked, such as strokes caused by clots that form in the heart, known as cardioembolic strokes. The causes of a transient ischemic attack, a short period of stroke-like symptoms, may include a blood clot that moves from another part of the body, such as the heart, to an artery that supplies the brain. The heart condition atherosclerosis, the buildup of fats, cholesterol and other substances in and on the artery walls, can also lead to a transient ischemic attack.

More research is needed to better understand how to harness the mind-heart connection for disease prevention and healing. There are steps you can take now for your mental health that will benefit your heart, and things you can do for your heart health that will benefit your brain, Dr. Alkhouli says.

"The good news is that what's good for your mind is often good for your heart, and vice versa," he explains. That includes:

- Managing stress.
- Getting quality sleep.
- Staying socially connected.
- Practicing mindfulness or prayer.

"All have measurable benefits for heart health," Dr. Alkhouli says. "Likewise, regular physical activity, a heart-healthy diet and controlling blood pressure and cholesterol can boost mood and cognitive function. It's a powerful feedback loop: Caring for one supports the other."

"The mind-heart connection is part of the broader mind-body relationship, but it's uniquely powerful. Emotional states like anxiety, grief, or even joy can directly influence heart rhythms, blood pressure, and even the risk of heart attacks," Dr. Alkhouli says.

Inkoly / Dreamstime / TNS

ASK THE PEDIATRICIAN

Which flu vaccine should children get?

By KRISTINA BRYANT, MD, FAAP
American Academy of Pediatrics (TNS)

Many people don't realize how serious influenza (flu) illness can be, even for previously healthy kids and teens. Children also play a role in spreading the flu in their homes, schools and communities.

The 2024-25 flu season was more severe than usual. A record number of U.S. children were hospitalized with the flu, and more than 260 died. As a parent, the best thing you can do to protect your children and others from the flu is to get them vaccinated.

Influenza viruses change yearly. All children 6 months and older need a flu vaccine every year. Children should get their influenza vaccine when the doses become available, especially if they need two doses this season. That way they will be protected before flu starts circulating in their community. It takes about two weeks after the vaccine to build immunity and develop protection.

There are two types of influenza vaccines available. The first is what many people call the "flu shot." The second comes as a nasal spray.

All the vaccines available for children this year protect against three different influenza viruses (two A viruses and one B virus). During flu season, multiple different flu viruses may circulate. Sometimes the viruses change during the flu season.

The American Academy of Pediatrics wants as many children as possible to get a flu vaccine every year.

Any licensed influenza vaccine available this year (flu shot or nasal spray) and appropriate for a child's age and health status can be given, with no preferred product or formulation. Influenza vaccination should not be delayed to get a specific product, including a thimerosal-free product.

Each year, it is possible that flu, COVID-19 and other common viruses will spread at the same time. Sometimes, the vaccine is not an exact match with the strains in the community. But the vaccine still can protect against serious illness. Talk with your pediatrician about your child getting the flu vaccine along with other recommended immunizations. Flu vaccine can also be given at the same visit as the respiratory syncytial virus (RSV) immunization.

Children with COVID should get a flu vaccine after they have recovered from their COVID illness. Keep in mind that symptoms such as a stuffy and runny nose can make it hard to give the nasal spray vaccine.

A child who had an allergic reaction after a flu vaccine in the past should be seen by an allergist. The allergist can help parents decide if their child should receive their annual flu vaccination. A child with a known history of egg allergy can receive the flu vaccine without any additional precautions beyond those recommended for all vaccines.

Many pediatricians offer flu vaccine clinics, including curbside and drive-through clinics. The pediatrician's office has your child's health information. That makes it easy to keep track of the flu shot in your child's health record. This year, the flu nasal spray can be administered at home to some eligible children by a patient or caregiver.

If your child gets a flu vaccine somewhere else besides the pediatrician's office, remember to share this information with the pediatrician so the vaccination is included in your child's health record.

Most people who get the flu are sick for at least a week. But some people get much sicker. Getting vaccinated is the best way to prevent influenza and the serious complications that can result from it – especially for those with high-risk conditions like asthma. For example, flu can lead to pneumonia. Kids with flu also can develop brain inflammation as well as febrile and non-febrile seizures.

The flu vaccine keeps people out of the hospital – it stops serious illness and deaths from influenza. The number of children who die from flu in a season has ranged from 1 child in 2020-2021 to 266 children in 2024-2025. This past season, 90 percent of pediatric flu-related deaths have been among children who were not fully vaccinated against influenza. Even children who are otherwise healthy and have no other medical conditions can be hospitalized with flu and develop life-threatening complications.

Michael M. Santiago / Getty Images / TNS

Flu and coronavirus (COVID-19) vaccine signage is seen at a Duane Reade on Jan. 5, 2023, in New York City.

There's no need to wait, even if your child received the previous year's flu vaccine in March or April. Children 6 months to 8 years of age should receive two doses if this is the first time they are being vaccinated against influenza, or if they have only received one dose of flu vaccine ever before July 1. The doses are given four weeks apart. If your child is 8 years old and requires 2 doses of influenza vaccine, they should receive both doses even if they turn 9 years old between dose 1 and dose 2.

We have a vaccine for flu, unlike many other respiratory viruses that make kids sick. Let's protect our children from flu when we can.

Kristina A. Bryant, MD, FAAP is a pediatric infectious diseases specialist at the University of Louisville and Norton Children's Hospital and a member of the American Academy of Pediatrics Committee on Infectious Diseases.

Vinnstock / Dreamstime / TNS

Denials can be appealed, but nearly half of insured adults who received a prior authorization denial in the past two years reported the appeals process was either somewhat or very difficult, according to a July poll published by KFF, a health information nonprofit that includes KFF Health News.

Fighting a health insurance denial?

Here are 7 tips to help

By LAUREN SAUSSER
KFF Health News (TNS)

When Sally Nix found out that her health insurance company wouldn't pay for an expensive, doctor-recommended treatment to ease her neurological pain, she prepared for battle.

It took years, a chain of conflicting decisions, and a health insurer switch before she finally won approval. She started treatment in January and now channels time and energy into helping other patients fight denials.

"One of the things I tell people when they come to me is: 'Don't panic. This isn't a final no,'" said Nix, 55, of Statesville, North Carolina.

To control costs, nearly all health insurers use a system called prior authorization, which requires patients or their providers to seek approval before they can get certain procedures, tests, and prescriptions.

Denials can be appealed, but nearly half of insured adults who received a prior authorization denial in the past two years reported the appeals process was either somewhat or very difficult, according to a July poll published by KFF, a health information nonprofit that includes KFF Health News.

"It's overwhelming by design," because insurers know confusion and fatigue cause people to give up, Nix said. "That's exactly what they want you to do."

The good news is you don't have to be an insurance expert to get results, she said. "You just need to know how to push back."

Here are tips to consider when faced with a prior authorization denial:

1. Know your insurance plan

Do you have insurance through your job? A plan purchased through healthcare.gov? Medicare? Medicare Advantage? Medicaid?

These distinctions can be confusing, but they matter a great deal. Different categories of health insurance are governed by different agencies and are therefore subject to different prior authorization rules.

For example, federal marketplace plans, as well as Medicare and Medicare Advantage plans, are regulated by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Employer-sponsored plans are regulated by the Department of Labor. Medicaid plans, administered by state agencies, are subject to both state and federal rules.

Learn the language specific to your policy. Health insurance companies do not apply prior authorization requirements uniformly across all plans. Read your policy closely to make sure your insurer is following its own rules, as well as regulations set by the state and federal government.

2. Work with your provider to appeal

Kathleen Lavanchy, who retired in 2024 from a job at an inpatient rehabilitation hospital in the Philadelphia area, spent much of her career communicating with health insurance companies on behalf of patients.

Before you contact your health insurer, call your provider, Lavanchy said, and ask to speak to a medical care manager or someone in the office who handles prior authorization appeals.

The good news is that your doctor's office may already be working on an appeal.

Medical staffers can act as "your voice," Nix said. "They know all the language."

You or your provider can request a "peer-to-peer" review during the appeals process, which allows your doctor to discuss your case over the phone with a medical professional who works for the insurance company.

3. Be organized

Many hospitals and doctors use a system called MyChart to organize medical records, test results, and communications so that they are easily accessible. Similarly, patients should keep track of all materials related to an insurance appeal – records of phone calls, emails, snail mail, and in-app messages.

Everything should be organized, either digitally or on paper, so that it can be easily referenced, Nix said. At one point, she said, her own records proved that her insurance company had given conflicting information. The records were "the thing that saved me," she said.

"Keep an amazing paper trail," she said. "Every call, every letter, every name."

Linda Jorgensen, executive director of the Special Needs Resource Project, a nonprofit offering online resources for patients with disabilities and their families, has advised patients who are fighting a denial to specifically keep paper copies of everything.

"If it isn't on paper, it didn't happen," she said.

Jorgensen, who serves as a caregiver to an adult daughter with special needs, created a free form you can print to help guide you when taking notes during phone calls with your insurance company. She advised asking the insurance representative for a "ticket number" and their name before proceeding with the conversation.

4. Appeal as soon as possible

The silver lining is that most denials, if appealed, are overturned.

Medicare Advantage data published by KFF in January found that nearly 82 percent of prior authorization denials from 2019 through 2023 were partially or fully overturned upon appeal.

But the clock is ticking. Most health plans give you only six months to appeal the decision, according to rules laid out in the Affordable Care Act.

"Don't dillydally," Jorgensen advised, especially if you're sending a paper appeal, or any supporting documents, through the U.S. Postal Service. She recommends filing quickly, and at least four weeks before the deadline.

For the sake of speed, some people are turning to artificial intelligence for help crafting customizable appeal letters.

5. Ask your HR department for help

If you get your health insurance through an employer, there's a good chance your health plan is "self-funded" or "self-insured." That means your employer contracts with a health insurance company to administer benefits, but your employer shoulders the cost of your care.

Why does that matter? Under self-funded plans, decisions about what is or isn't covered ultimately rest with your employer.

Let's say, for example, your doctor has recommended that you undergo surgery, and your insurer has denied prior authorization for it, deeming the procedure "not medically necessary," a phrase commonly used. If your plan is self-funded, you can appeal to the human resources department at your job, because your employer is on the hook for your health care costs – not the insurer.

Of course, there's no guarantee your employer will agree to pay. But, at the very least, it's worth reaching out for help.

6. Find an advocate

Many states operate free consumer assistance programs, available by phone or email, which can help you file an appeal. They can explain your benefits and may intervene if your insurance company isn't complying with requirements.

Beyond that, some nonprofit advocacy groups, such as the Patient Advocate Foundation, might help. On the foundation's website is guidance about what to include in an appeal letter. For those battling severe disease, foundation staffers can work with you one-on-one to fight a denial.

7. Make noise

We've written about this before. Sometimes, when patients and doctors shame insurers online, denials get overturned.

The same holds when patients contact lawmakers. State laws regulate some categories of health insurance, and when it comes to setting policy, state lawmakers have the power to hold insurance companies accountable.

Reaching out to your legislator isn't guaranteed to work, but it might be worth a shot.

KFF Health News is a national newsroom that produces in-depth journalism about health issues and is one of the core operating programs of KFF – the independent source for health policy research, polling and journalism.

5 ways students can think about learning so that they can learn more – and how their teachers can help

By JERRID KRUSE
Drake University (The Conversation)

In other words, my students had developed a strong preconceived notion that knowledge comes from authority. After investigating, my colleagues and I concluded that these beliefs about learning were influencing how they approached our lessons – and thus what they were able to learn.

During my years teaching science in middle school, high school and college, some of my students have resisted teaching that educators call higher-order thinking. This includes analysis, creative and critical thinking, and problem-solving.

For example, when I asked them to draw conclusions from data or generate a process for testing an idea, some students replied, "Why don't you tell us what to do?" or "Isn't it the teacher's job to tell us the right answers?"

In other words, my students had developed a strong preconceived notion that knowledge comes from authority. After investigating, my colleagues and I concluded that these beliefs about learning were influencing how they approached our lessons – and thus what they were able to learn.

All students come to class with a range of beliefs about what it means to learn. In the field of education, perhaps the most sought-after belief is what we call having a growth mindset. Students with a growth mindset believe they can improve and continue to learn. In contrast, students with a fixed mindset struggle to believe they can become more knowledgeable about the topic they're studying. When students say, "I'm bad at math," they exhibit a fixed mindset.

As teachers, we not only try to help students understand the topic at hand but also aim to instill accurate beliefs about learning so nothing interferes with their ability to take in new information.

Other than the growth mindset, I argue that five other beliefs are particularly important to promote in classrooms to help students become better learners and more prepared for the modern world.

Learning is understanding

Some students and teachers equate learning to memorizing.

While memorization has a role in learning, deep learning is about understanding. Students will be well served recognizing that learning is about explaining and connecting concepts to make meaning.

Too much focus on memorizing can hide gaps in learning.

For example, I was once working with a preschool student when they proudly demonstrated their ability to recite the numbers 1 through 20. I then asked the student to count the pencils on the desk. The student did not understand my request. They had not connected these new words to the number concept.

To help students recognize the importance of understanding for learning, teachers and parents might engage students in questions such as, "Why is connecting a new idea to an old idea better than just trying to memorize the answer?" or "Why is an explanation more useful than just an answer?"

Learning is complex and requires challenge

Students' belief that learning is akin to memorization may reflect a related belief that knowledge is simple and learning should be easy.

Instead, educators want students to embrace complexity and its challenges. Through wrestling with nuance and complexity, students engage in the mental effort required to form and reinforce new connections in their thinking.

When students believe knowledge is simple and learning should be easy, their engagement in higher-order thinking, which is required to embrace complexity and nuance, suffers.

To help students who are struggling grasp a complex idea, teachers and parents might ask questions that help students see why learning is complex and requires challenge.

Learning takes time

When students believe learning is simple and easy, educators should not be surprised they think learning should be fast as well.

Instead, students ought to understand that deep learning takes time. If students believe learning is quick, they are less likely to seek challenge, explore nuance or reflect and make connections among ideas. Unfortunately, many curricula pack so much intended learning into a short amount of time that beliefs in quick learning are subtly reinforced.

While teachers can get creative with curricular materials – and spend more time challenging students to explore complexity and make connections – just spending more time on a concept may not be enough to shift a student's beliefs about learning.

To help students shift their thinking about the speed of learning, I ask them to discuss questions such as, "Why do you think understanding complex concepts takes so much time?" or "Why would only covering this concept for one lesson not be enough?" With these questions, my colleagues and I have found students start to recognize that deep learning is slow and takes time.

Learning is ongoing

Students should also recognize that learning doesn't end.

Unfortunately, many students believe learning to be a destination rather than an ongoing process. Yet, because knowledge contains an inherent level of uncertainty, and increased learning often reveals increased complexity, learning must be continuous.

To help students reflect on this belief, teachers and parents might ask their students, "How do you think your knowledge has changed over time?" and "How do you think your learning will change in the future?"

Learning is not only from teachers

I remember one high school student telling me that "teachers are supposed to tell us the answers, so we know what to put on the test."

This student had apparently figured out the "rules of the game" and was not happy when their teacher was trying to engage them in higher-order thinking. This student was holding onto a transmission model of learning in which learning comes from authority figures.

Instead, students should recognize that learning comes from many sources, including their experiences, their peers and their own thinking, as well as from authority figures.

While teachers and parents may hesitate to undermine their own authority, they do students a disservice when they do not prepare them to question and go beyond authority figures.

To help students shift their thinking, teachers might ask students to consider, "Why might learning from multiple sources help you better understand the complexity and nuance of a concept?"

Building better beliefs about learning

Often, teachers and parents believe opportunities to engage in higher-order thinking are enough to help their students develop better beliefs about learning.

But such beliefs require explicit attention and must be planned for in lessons. This is done by asking reflective questions that target specific beliefs, such as the questions noted in the final sentence of each of the previous sections.

In my experience, the conversations I've had with students using the questions noted above are highly engaging. Moreover, helping kids develop more robust beliefs about learning just might be the most important thing teachers can do to prepare students for the future.

Jerrid Kruse is a professor of science education at Drake University.

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THE CONVERSATION

FINANCE

Medicaid cuts are coming

4 ways Americans with disabilities can start protecting their finances

By LANE GILLESPIE
Bankrate.com (TNS)

Dreamstime / TNS

Alexis Leone, a 34-year-old mother of five in rural Mississippi, initially tried her best to juggle her full-time job with her youngest child's needs.

Leone's son is partially deaf and has a severe allergy to ants. But her workplace was unable to accommodate Leone's multiple appointments a week for speech therapy, weekly allergy treatments and other medical needs for her son, and she says it was unwilling to work with her Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) request. (FMLA is a federal labor law that requires most companies to offer unpaid, protected leave for a family or medical reason.) So, she quit her job, and she now relies on Medicaid and her husband's commission-based income to meet her family's health and financial needs.

Under her old workplace's insurance, medical co-pays alone for her son cost $200 a week, which she already struggled to afford before she quit her job. Today, those co-pays – as well as health care for her other four children – are completely covered under Medicaid. But, because of the Trump administration's sweeping Medicaid cuts that passed in July, Leone isn't sure how much longer she'll be able to afford her children's health care.

The cuts are part of President Donald Trump's broad tax and spending bill, dubbed the One Big Beautiful Bill (OBBB) Act, and mainly tighten restrictions on disabled adults' access to care, not children's. Still, the cuts might affect Leone's family's access to Medicaid through new, stricter work requirements for adults and additional paperwork that families will have to fill out every year to keep their coverage. What's more, the National Rural Health Association estimates rural hospitals will lose a significant amount of funding due to the bill or could close outright, which could affect Leone's family's access to local health care providers. Leone has difficulty accessing providers that accept Medicaid near her, as it is – her children's dentist is a two-hour drive away.

Leone hopes her family's financial situation will improve to the point that they won't need to rely on Medicaid by the time most of the changes go through in 2027. If their financial situation doesn't improve, she just hopes her child with a disability will continue to have access to health care, despite the cuts.

"If we have to have private insurance or no insurance (for my kids), it's going to be almost impossible to then afford to get the services that are needed," Leone says.

This summer, the 70 million Americans enrolled in Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) learned that the vital health care they'd come to rely on through public assistance could disappear, as the Trump administration gutted the 60-year-old program. The OBBB Act that passed this year and was signed by Trump in July would cut funding by nearly $1 trillion and would lead to 10.5 million fewer people enrolled in Medicaid over the next 10 years, according to estimates by the Congressional Budget Office. The Trump administration says the bill will lead to less Medicaid fraud. However, Medicaid cuts will increase costs and limit provider availability for many disabled Americans. With limited or no access to Medicaid, many Americans with disabilities will have to make tough choices about where their money goes.

Today, Leone's family doesn't save money and can barely cover their bills, which is more common for people with disabilities and their families than the general American population. While 24 percent of employed people feel they are completely financially secure, only 7 percent of unemployed, permanently disabled people say the same, according to Bankrate's Financial Freedom Survey. Similarly, 65 percent of unemployed, permanently disabled people feel they are not completely financially secure and likely never will be, compared to 25 percent of employed people.

"Meeting financial goals such as saving for emergencies and retirement or paying for basic necessities like quality healthcare and groceries is a formidable challenge for every American," says Bankrate U.S. Economy Reporter Sarah Foster, who has reported on economic policy and its effect on American households for over six years. "Add in the experience of living with a chronic illness or disability, and those aspirations may feel almost insurmountable."

4 tips for disabled Americans concerned about their finances under the Medicaid cuts

People with disabilities often face financial pressure from two sides: They may pay more in health care costs than other households, and they may also struggle to pay those costs because they can face barriers to attaining well-paying, accessible jobs.

"People with disabilities might lack adequate transportation to and from work; they might need on-the-job assistance or more flexible paid time off that workplaces don't provide," Foster says. "It's also true that their jobs get cut faster during the busts and take longer to come back during the booms. All of those factors can confine them to a sustained state of financial stress and insecurity."

However, there are federal and online resources that can help you look for a higher-paying job, balance your budget and save money. If you're looking for new strategies to manage your money in anticipation of Medicaid cuts, these tips can help get you started.

1. See where you can cut expenses

Whether you earn a wage through a job, receive benefits or both, if you're interested in saving more, it's worth your time to find where you can cut back on both fixed and variable expenses.

Variable expenses – expenses that aren't set from month to month, such as food or transportation costs – are easier to cut down on than fixed expenses, which remain the same from month to month. If you want to save on variable expenses, you can make small changes starting today, like buying in bulk, using public transportation instead of ride-shares or thrifting for clothing, furniture and home goods, instead of buying new.

It's a little bit more work to save money on your fixed expenses, but you may be surprised at how often you can negotiate your regular bills. Consider these methods to save money on your fixed expenses:

Rent or mortgage, including utilities, taxes, fees and maintenance

■ Live with roommates or family, if possible (even temporarily). You can save money on energy bills by unplugging devices when you aren't using them and using room-temperature water when doing laundry. The U.S. Department of Energy also has a guide on how to save on energy bills.

Phone, internet and cable bills

■ You may be able to negotiate your phone or internet bill if you call your provider.

Debt repayment, such as for a car, student loans or credit cards

■ If you have outstanding credit card or automotive debt, you may be able to call your issuer to negotiate your balance to avoid the balance being sent to collections. Most automotive, student loan and credit card issuers might also offer hardship programs or be willing to settle your debt for a lower amount.

Medical coinsurance, co-pays and prescription costs

■ If you have existing medical debt, call the provider and see if you can negotiate for a payment plan or lower balance. You can also often access prescription coupons from the manufacturer's website or through third-party platforms like GoodRx.

Child care costs

■ Consider alternative child care options, such as family, nanny shares or child care co-ops. You may also be able to access certain tax credits for families, such as the child and dependent care credit or the child tax credit.

Memberships, such as gym memberships

■ Try out DIY options, such as buying home gym equipment secondhand or doing beauty treatments (such as your hair and nails) at home.

2. Look into specialized assistance

If you have a disability and need help paying for expenses, you may qualify for local and state programs. You can find more information through your state's Health and Human Services office. Nationally, you may also qualify for assistance with your:

■ Rent or mortgage. Non-elderly disabled vouchers can help people under the age of 62 with a disability find and pay for affordable rentals. If you're a senior citizen, you can also access housing choice vouchers, affordable housing or public housing.

■ Utilities. The Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEA) helps with heating and cooling bills. Some states also offer help with electric bills.

■ Phone and internet. Lifeline offers discounts on phone and internet bills for low-income households.

■ Food and household goods. Depending on your age and members of your family, you may be eligible for food assistance, including the Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP). If you're disabled or homebound, your local food bank may be able to deliver food, personal hygiene products and cleaning supplies. Reach out to your nearest food bank to learn what resources they offer for disabled individuals.

If you're a disabled veteran struggling financially, you can also turn to certain specialized programs and grants.

3. Save more by opening an ABLE account

If you're concerned about being able to afford health care as a disabled person, you might want to consider saving money now in an ABLE account. An ABLE account is a tax-advantaged savings account specifically for people with disabilities who qualify. You can use the funds only for disability-related expenses, including housing, education, transportation, health, prevention and wellness, assistive technology and personal support services, according to the U.S. Internal Revenue Service. To open an ABLE account, there are a few qualifications you need to meet – notably, your disability must have started before you were 26 years old. (This will increase to 46 in January 2026.)

While you must have a disability that started before the age of 26 to open one, anyone can contribute to an eligible person's ABLE account, though annual contributions are limited to $19,000, as of 2025.

If you're worried about a major upcoming expense, like a medical procedure, or if you want to make sure you have funds to use in an emergency, you should prioritize saving, starting today. Ideally, it's best to save 20 percent of your take-home pay for emergency savings, retirement and debt repayment, but it's OK if you're not able to save that much. If you receive the average Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) payment of $1,738 per month, try saving as little as $50 per month, which could help pay for a future car tire or minor medical bill.

To open an ABLE account, check out your state's program.

4. Look for job assistance near you

If you're concerned about losing your Medicaid eligibility and are interested in going back to work (or working for the first time), you don't have to face today's challenging job market alone. Federal and state-level programs are designed to help you find the right job placement. If you're on SSI or SSDI, you may even be able to keep your benefits while you work. Generally, you can receive SSI if you make less than $2,019 per month as a single person. You can receive SSDI benefits if you earn less than $1,550 per month.

Check out these programs for more help with finding the right job:

■ Ticket to Work: Ticket to Work is a free program administered by the Social Security Administration (SSA) for those 18 to 64 on Social Security disability benefits. It provides one-on-one guidance, such as resume and interview help, as well as benefits counseling to explain how returning to work affects your federal and state benefits. Through Ticket to Work, if you earn enough at your new job that your SSDI payments stop, you can continue to receive Medicare for more than 7 years.

■ State Vocational Rehabilitation Agencies: Different states offer different vocational services for adults with disabilities, and many offer specialized services for the blind or visually impaired, as well as for people under the age of 18. In Texas, for example, a counselor can help place you with a job that aligns with your needs and interests through tuition assistance, specialized training, vehicle modification, therapy and other services.

The bottom line

If you receive disability benefits, understanding your financial options can help you navigate your personal finances with confidence. You can also check out other financial resources for disabled or low-income families, which can help you establish credit or even purchase a home.

Key takeaways:

■ President Donald Trump signed a bill in July that would implement cuts to Medicaid enrollment and funding, which will be rolled out over the next three years. The cuts would increase medical costs for many Americans with disabilities and may make it harder for some families to save or balance their budgets.

■ Disabled people concerned about Medicaid cuts can consider opening an ABLE account or looking into personalized job assistance.

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Dreamstime / TNS

You're likely encountering AI in your financial life already, with or without knowing it.

AI is transforming how we bank

What this means for your money

By KAREN BENNETT
Bankrate.com (TNS)

Artifical intelligence (AI) is likely to reshape our lives in as big a way as the internet did in the 1990s and smartphones did in the 2000s (scary or exciting as that may be). That means changes to your regular life and your banking life, too. You're likely encountering AI in your financial life already, with or without knowing it.

Banks sometimes use AI to help prevent fraud, for example, and while some people may be nervous about using AI, others are largely on board. In fact, 62 percent of bank customers said they'd immediately try AI-driven alerts to help avoid service charges and fees, according to a 2024 J.D. Power report.

Here are a few ways AI is already transforming how we bank, including helping you manage your money and keep it safe, and some potential downsides to watch out for.

Fraud detection

Fraud is a pervasive issue right now. More than half (60 percent) of financial institutions and fintechs reported seeing an increase in fraud in 2024, according to a recent State of Fraud report from Alloy, an identity and fraud prevention platform provider.

AI-powered fraud-prevention software can help detect when fraudsters attempt to open fake accounts or take over a consumer's existing account, and thwart them in real time. It can also identify patterns to help prevent future attacks, says Sara Seguin, director of advisory at Alloy.

Seguin provides some examples of how AI can aid in preventing bank fraud:

■ Flagging when a known customer's behavior is out of the ordinary, such as a large funds transfer

■ Analyzing customer requests to change their information, such as whether a new email address has been associated with fraud in the past

■ Identifying and reporting anomalies such as a large increase in the number of accounts opened in a single day at a given bank

Barclays, a multinational financial-services firm, is using generative AI (which learns patterns in data and creates something new) to manage fraud and money-laundering risks. Barclays' AI system generates a warning when behavior takes place that's not typical for a given customer. "Generative AI means that risk assessments for the customer are being brought to an individual and safer level," the Barclays website reads.

Enhanced customer service

In addition to helping banks keep you safe from fraud, AI is being used to enhance customer service offerings in various ways.

■ 24/7 actually helpful chatbots

Chatbots are a common bank offering powered by AI, and the use of natural language processing is helping these 24/7 customer service bots to better interpret human language and provide a more personalized experience.

An example of a chatbot that uses AI is Bank of America's virtual assistant Erica. Erica can be used for purposes that include monitoring recurring charges, staying on top of upcoming bills and tracking your spending.

■ Fewer fields on application forms

In addition to incorporating AI into chatbots and customer service channels, some companies are also utilizing AI to make it easier for people to fill out forms online, such as for loan applications, says Sal Rehmetullah, CEO of Worth AI. Worth AI's business clients use the company's software to provide their customers with application forms on which only a few fields need to be entered manually – while AI takes care of the remainder of the data collection.

■ More tailored financial advice from your financial adviser

While the human touch remains vital to a financial adviser's role, some providers are utilizing AI to augment their services, says Michelle Bonat, Chief AI Officer at Squared. Examples she provides include using AI-powered tools for how to best approach a client or prospect, identifying cross-sell or up-sell opportunities, and researching portfolio recommendations.

JPMorgan Chase is an example of a bank whose private client advisers are using AI tools to conduct research to inform client conversations, according to a recent Reuters article.

■ Personalized recommendations

Banks can use AI for predictive personalization, which harnesses machine learning and data-driven insights to predict what features or products a given customer wants to see, and then tailors the customer's experience accordingly.

Bonat compares this type of opportunity for banks to the way companies like Amazon and Spotify recommend products or songs based on what people similar to you have chosen. "It's like Spotify for your money," she says. "It sees what you've been doing and makes recommendations to you based on that."

For instance, a bank may give a customer with a rewards credit card an offer to open a rewards checking account.

The majority of consumers and business leaders see some benefits to such personalized offer suggestions, according to data from Zendesk. It states that 62 percent of consumers agree that personalized recommendations are better than general ones, while 77 percent of business leaders believe that deeper personalization leads to customer retention.

But if you feel wary of having AI give you money advice or generally be "in" your money business because you don't understand how or why it's making its recommendations, you're not alone. "I think we have to do more work as an industry on making AI more trustworthy," says AI Squared's Bonat.

Lack of transparency in how AI works can foster mistrust

Often, there can be a lack of transparency in how an AI system is producing its content or making its decisions. This problem has commonly been referred to as "black box AI." Examples include Open AI's ChatGPT and Meta's Llama, both of which can answer a user's questions but don't show how the answers were generated.

What's next for AI in financial services?

We asked a few experts about what they saw as the future of AI in financial services:

If you use AI program ChatGPT to create a budget right now, you're likely to get a "very static, very one-time" result, often through the generation of a spreadsheet, says Bonat. The real promise of AI in banking and financial planning is to have it be predictive and hyper-personalized, she says.

"Consumers will have AI bots," says Ronit Ghose, Head of Future of Finance at Citi Global Insights, who likens these bots to J.A.R.V.I.S., the AI assistant to the character Tony Stark in Marvel's Iron Man films.

Such autonomous agents could be used by everyday people to help manage their lives, Ghose says. The bots could handle tasks such as data gathering and comparison shopping, which ultimately could save you time and effort when making decisions.

"AI could basically become your own personal financial butler or personal financial adviser, " Ghose says.

Bottom line

Whether you're looking to budget your money or manage investments, AI may start to play a bigger role in helping you make decisions. Banks are increasingly using AI-powered technology to provide customer service and match their customers with personalized features and offers.

However, there's room for improvement when it comes to increasing transparency so that users of this technology can understand and trust it more.

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FOOD

GRETCHEN'S TABLE

Colorful sumac sauce levels up turkey, zucchini meatballs

By GRETCHEN MCKAY
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette (TNS)

Meatballs are pretty much an "everybody" food. They can be made with almost any type of ground protein – including poultry, beef, pork and lamb – and sometimes there's no meat at all. Instead, they're rolled together with legumes, beans, grains, mushrooms and/or a whole host of vegetables.

They're just as versatile when it comes to serving. Often plopped on top of pasta, meatballs can be tucked into a hoagie roll or sandwiched between two pieces of sturdy bread, piled high on mashed potatoes or a hearty grain like polenta, or stirred into soup to help flavor the broth and add some heft to every spoonful.

The size can also vary depending on what's being dished onto a plate or into a bowl – they can be so big with a side of marinara that they have to be shared, or so small they're best served on the end of a toothpick as an appetizer.

In this gluten-free recipe from Israeli British chef and cookbook author Yotam Ottolenghi, the tender meatballs are made with ground turkey, fresh mint and a prolific summer veggie we can't seem to use fast enough: shredded zucchini.

The veggie-heavy recipe is something of a weeknight warrior, or perhaps the better word is lifesaver. The meatball mixture comes together very quickly in one bowl, is full of fresh, herbal flavors and is incredibly easy to portion if you use a spring-loaded cookie scoop. Also, the meatballs can be made in advance and stored in the fridge or freezer until you're ready to cook and eat them. In other words, it's ideal for busy people.

Used as a replacement for bread crumbs, the shredded zucchini both adds moisture to the mix (making the meatballs tender) and acts as a binder. It also adds fiber without also adding a lot of calories.

What makes the dish extra special is the colorful sauce that goes on top. Made by mixing sour cream, yogurt and lemon with ground sumac, a tangy spice with a lemony kick made from pulverized dried sumac berries, it's a beautiful purplish pink that might make you think of cotton candy or raspberry ice cream.

They can be served as a main course with sauce on the side for dipping. Or, tuck them into a warm pita for a sandwich.

Served with a tangy, purple sumac sauce, these gluten-free turkey meatballs include a secret ingredient that's plentiful in late summer shredded zucchini.

Gretchen McKay / Pittsburgh Post-Gazette / TNS

Turkey and Zucchini Meatballs

I slightly smashed the meatballs into patties after I put them in the pan to cook so they wouldn't roll around when tucked into a pita. The tangy sumac sauce and fresh herbs add a bright kick of flavor.

FOR SAUCE:
Scant 1/2 cup sour cream
Scant 2/3 cup Greek yogurt
1 teaspoon grated lemon zest
1 tablespoon lemon juice
1 small garlic clove, crushed
1 1/2 tablespoons olive oil
1 tablespoon sumac
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/4 teaspoon black pepper

FOR MEATBALLS:
1 pounds ground turkey, preferably thigh meat
1 large zucchini, coarsely grated (scant 2 cups)
3 green onions, thinly sliced
1 large egg
2 tablespoons chopped mint
2 tablespoons chopped cilantro
2 garlic cloves, crushed
1 teaspoon ground cumin
1 teaspoon salt
1/2 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
1/2 teaspoon cayenne
1/3 cup neutral oil, for cooking

Make sour cream sauce: Place all the ingredients in a small bowl. Stir well and set aside or chill until needed.

In a large bowl, combine all meatball ingredients except the neutral oil. Avoiding overworking; mix gently with your hands until just combined.

Shape into 1 1/2-ounce meatballs (you can gently flatten them into patties to make them easier to cook), making roughly 18. A spring-loaded scoop is quick, but using your hands or a pair of spoons works well, too.

Cook the meatballs: Set a large cast-iron skillet or nonstick pan over medium heat. When the pan is hot, add a thin layer of oil and, when it shimmers, carefully lay in about half of the patties, leaving space between them for steam to escape.

Let meatballs begin to brown before using a thin, flexible metal spatula to rotate and move them around the pan.

Flip patties after 3-5 minutes, when they are a deep golden brown, and continue cooking in the same way on the second side.

The zucchini will keep the meatballs very tender even once fully cooked, so it might be hard to tell when they are done by pressing on them. Feel free to cut into one or two with a paring knife and take a peek to get a feel for the texture of a cooked patty. You'll know the meatballs are done when there's no sign of pink inside.

Serve these warm or at room temperature, with the sauce on the side. Or make a sandwich on pita, with mint and cilantro tucked in for a fresh crunch.

– Yotam Ottolenghi

Fresh red peppers are the star of this panzanella recipe

By BETH DOOLEY
The Minnesota Star Tribune (TNS)

Panzanella, the classic Italian salad of sun-split tomatoes and crisped croutons flush with a bold vinaigrette, is the pinnacle of the late summer harvest.

And if we were in Tuscany, home of the original panzanella, and sipping chianti as the sun sinks into the hills, that dish might include a whole lot more – roasted red peppers or roasted eggplant, or blanched green beans, perhaps tomatoes.

In Italy, panzanella simply means bread salad. Born of Italian thrift and creativity, it's a delicious way to dispatch stale bread and what's left in the garden. This recipe was inspired by a bounty of plump, almost too-ripe, red bell peppers from the farmers market. It showcases their sweet, smoky nature when blistered under the broiler or on the grill, and it relies on a few slices of stale miche, baguette or ciabatta.

Though some recipes recommend soaking the bread in water first, that step washes out its flavor and texture. Lightly toasted dried-out bread has the best texture, crisped on the outside and chewy within and just absorbent enough to soak up all the salad's components.

The backbone of this salad is the fragrant basil vinaigrette. Simply whizz together handfuls of garden-fresh basil, peppery olive oil, fresh garlic and a splash of snappy red wine vinegar. The bread, when well toasted, won't turn to mush as the salad rests and the ingredients meld together.

This is a wonderful make-ahead summer salad. Turn it into a vegetarian meal by adding a cupful of cooked white beans and/or mozzarella and shredded Parmesan cheese. For omnivores, toss in grilled chicken, sausage or salmon. It will hold up for a potluck, backyard barbecue, picnic or an easy and elegant dinner on the deck. Don't forget the chianti.

Harvest Panzanella
Serves 6

You can make this ahead, just be sure to toast the bread well so it doesn't turn to mush as the flavors meld together. Use any fresh veggies you have on hand. This recipe features roasted peppers but tomatoes, corn and green beans all work beautifully. Add a few olives for color and punch.

4 large red bell peppers (about 2 lb.)
1/2 c. extra-virgin olive oil, divided
Coarse salt
Freshly ground black pepper
1 small onion, thinly sliced
1/2 baguette or country-style bread, cubed into 1-in. squares (about 10 to 12 c.)
2 cloves garlic, minced
3 tbsp. red wine vinegar
Generous pinch red pepper flakes
1/4 c. chopped fresh basil
2 tbsp. chopped parsley

Preheat the broiler on high or prepare the grill. Toss the peppers with 1 tablespoon of the oil and season with the salt and pepper.

Roast the peppers, turning occasionally until their skins are blackened and blistered all over, about 10 to 12 minutes. Remove and cover with a kitchen towel or set in a paper bag to cool for 15 minutes. Peel and seed the peppers and cut into 1- to 2-inch pieces. Transfer to a large bowl and add the onion.

Preheat the oven to 400 degrees. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper. Scatter the bread cubes over the baking sheet and drizzle with 2 tablespoons of the oil, tossing until well coated. Season with salt and pepper and toast in the oven, shaking the pan occasionally, until crisped and brown, about 8 to 10 minutes. Remove and allow to cool.

Put the garlic, vinegar, pinch of red pepper flakes, basil, parsley and the remaining oil into a blender and whizz together.

Transfer the toasted bread cubes to the bowl with the vegetables and toss with the vinaigrette. Taste and adjust the seasoning, adding additional oil and vinegar, salt, red pepper flakes, and black pepper as necessary. Cover and allow the flavors to mingle at least 1 hour or up to 4 hours before serving.

Beth Dooley is the author of "The Perennial Kitchen." Find her at bethdooleys kitchen.com.

ENTERTAINMENT

Ozzy Osbourne, left, and Randy Rhoads perform during the Blizzard of Ozz tour at Nassau Coliseum in Uniondale, New York, on Aug. 14, 1981. The first episode of "Into the Void" focuses on Rhoads' career and untimely death.
Gary Gershoff / Getty Images / TNS

'Lilith Fair' and *'Into the Void'* provide enlightening perspectives on contrasting music genres

By ROBERT LLOYD
Los Angeles Times (TNS)

Two music-themed documentaries, one (seemingly) all about darkness and the other (actually) all about light, arrive on Hulu nearly together. "Into the Void: Life, Death and Heavy Metal," which premiered Monday, is an eight-part film – really eight films arranged around the title theme. "Lilith Fair: Building a Mystery," which premiered Sunday, revisits Sarah McLachlan's late-'90s all-female traveling music festival. From these extremely disparate approaches to subject matter, volume and vocals have been wrought often moving testaments to self-expression, community and finding a voice in a world that might not want you to be heard, or at least to help you do it. You may learn something, or think a little differently about what you thought you knew. Each might inspire a little tear, or a lot of big ones.

"Into the Void" is not a history or a survey but looks at individual cases from across the years and the metal spectrum. Most involve tragic circumstances – early death by accident, suicide or from illness in the most extreme cases – though the approach is more sympathetic than sensational; this isn't "Behind the Music" or, for that matter, "Spinal Tap," with its exploding drummers. (All musicians know that everything in that movie – I haven't seen the sequel yet – is true.) Familiarity with or even interest in metal and its subgenres is not a prerequisite; these are human stories, involving enough on their own.

" Randy Rhoads " looks at the life of the guitar hero killed at 25 in a small plane crash while on tour with Ozzy Osbourne. "Kurt Struebing of NME" focuses on the mentally ill Seattle black metal guitarist and singer who murdered his mother while under the influence but put his life together after eight years in prison, only to later steer his car off a bridge. "Judas Priest on Trial" recalls how the English band was sued when two young fans executed a suicide pact – one successful, one surviving but disfigured – supposedly under the influence of a subliminal message in their music. "Chuck Schuldiner of Death," is about the influential death metal singer-guitarist who died from a brain tumor as he sought to bring new dimensions to his music. (Those not schooled in the genre might have trouble distinguishing the new dimensions from the old, but that's on your/my untrained ear.) "Dimebag Darrell" concerns the highly regarded Pantera founding guitarist, murdered onstage by a disturbed fan while playing with his post-Pantera band, Damageplan; but it's also very much about volatility among bandmates.

"Wendy O. Williams" revisits the half-clad singer of the Plasmatics, who smashed TVs, chainsawed guitars, blew up automobiles in the course of her performances, creating controversy wherever they went. If you saw them, you may have missed the antimaterialist subtext, or the sweet, thoughtful person inside the performer. Williams was sort of punk to begin with, but fully metal afterward. The ending is sad, but somehow, as recounted by surviving partner Rod Swenson, not depressing. "Ann Boleyn of Hellion" is a story of sexism and stalkers, set against the Sunset Strip in its big-haired pomp, focused on a performer that all here agree should have been huge; it goes somewhere sweetly surprising at the finish.

A happy ending also awaits singer/guitarist Nikan Khosravi and DJ Arash Ilkhani of the thrash metal band Confess, in the often nightmarish "Iranian Metal Crusade." In a country where all metal is underground and a lyric can get you hung, the pair spent 18 months in prison, three in solitary confinement, awaiting trial, before fleeing the country while finally out on bail. If you know your metal subgenres, I won't have to tell you the country where they wind up.

Obviously, you can't apply a single description to an entire audience, but for many fans, certainly, metal has provided a sense of empowerment, of belonging, of possibility. So it is for the musician themselves, who all began as fans, and the ones highlighted here took it seriously, youthful indiscretions notwithstanding. (The sex and drugs aspects of rock 'n' roll are not much discussed; but family is.) Many of the band members interviewed here, some decades after the moment of their greatest success, look back with a bemused sense of proportion and, where appropriate, regret.

There was no metal on the bill at Lilith Fair, or, to judge by Ally Pankiw's film, anything in the way of ego or arguments or any sort of bad behavior, backstage or before it. (Compare and contrast it with the disastrous Woodstock '99, with its sexual assaults, vandalism and arson.) The challenges of sending a first-of-its-kind giant traveling show into the world without knowing whether the world would show up are duly recounted. ("It felt like we were building the airplane while we were already flying it," says production manager Catherine Runnals.) But "Building a Mystery" is primarily a celebration of a success – and why not?

"Lilith Fair came from a very radical place," says Ann Powers, former L.A. Times and current NPR music critic. "But in the moment if felt totally mainstream, totally in the center, and that was its power."

The festival was built around solo artists, female singer-songwriters, who were having a moment; nevertheless, it was a time when promoters wouldn't even put two women on the same bill and radio stations were loath to play female artists back to back. Lilith, for Adam's mythological unsubmissive first wife, with Fair standing for equal, beautiful and a celebration, was a wild idea made reality, and one whose success would propel it through three summers, from 1997 to 1999. Main stage performers at one time or another included Tracy Chapman, Sheryl Crow, Suzanne Vega, Erykah Badu, Natalie Merchant, the Indigo Girls, Missy Elliott, Paula Cole, Jewel, Emmylou Harris, Liz Phair, Bonnie Raitt, Chrissie Hynde, Queen Latifah and Sinead O'Connor – not just Girls With Acoustic Guitars.

Simply by existing, it was a magnet for mockery and criticism, in the press – on morning radio and late-night television. Even some participants were at first unsure of whether they wanted to be there, though to judge by their recollections, everyone succumbed to the good vibes and the atmosphere McLachlan set. ("Less competitive, and a little more considerate," remembers Raitt.) Offstage there were birthday cakes and dance parties; onstage there was collaboration. (Outside there were anti-choice protesters; bomb and other threats were a constant.)

A 2010 revival was unsuccessful; dates were canceled for low ticket sales, though with the likes of Cat Power, Janelle Monáe, Brandi Carlile, Metric, Mary J. Blige and Tegan and Sara joining the returning veterans, it would have been a good day out. Now, when women dominate popular music, a Lilith Fair might not seem as culturally necessary; but those were different times,

Dan Levy, an executive producer, attended. "I was 12 or 13 at the time, still in the closet and had been bullied, and never really felt safe anywhere that I was because I wasn't being myself," he recalls here. "And you look around and you see people smiling and laughing and holding onto each other, and you just had people that were being themselves, celebrating themselves, it felt this kind of quiet revolution. I was like, 'What is this freedom?'"

"They were coming to support an idea," says Phair, who credits Lilith Fair with her decision to carry on playing. "I can be safe, I can be respected, I can be open … That was a very Sarah experience."

Good music too.

'Into the Void: Life, Death and Heavy Metal'

How to watch: Hulu

'Lilith Fair: Building a Mystery'

How to watch: Hulu

Saul Loeb / AFP via Getty Images / TNS

Kanye West meets with President Donald Trump in the Oval Office of the White House in Washington, D.C., on Oct. 11, 2018.

How a teen joined Kanye West's inner circle and filmed him unfiltered for 6 years

By JOSH ROTTENBERG
Los Angeles Times (TNS)

LOS ANGELES — The black SUV rolls toward the White House, carrying Kanye West to a meeting with President Donald Trump that's already destined to become a media circus. In the backseat, wearing a red MAGA cap pulled low, West leans into his phone, words tumbling out in a torrent to Trump's son-in-law and adviser Jared Kushner.

"I need to go in the exact way that a foreign dignitary would go," he insists. "I'm not going to step outside and put my life in danger. I put my life in danger by wearing the hat and I need to be loved and respected as such. Because there could be someone out there that could be trying to take a shot at me. There's people who potentially want to kill me for wearing this hat. If I get killed for wearing the hat in front of the White House, you're not going to win any midterms."

Beside him sits Nico Ballesteros, a teenager from Orange County, camera in hand, worn down by months of near-constant filming and fighting to keep his eyes open.

To the public, the October 2018 White House visit was a surreal collision of politics and celebrity. West – who once blasted George W. Bush for not caring about Black people, and who now goes by Ye – delivered a rambling, livestreamed 10-minute monologue that veered from hydrogen-powered planes to "male energy" to his own bipolar disorder, one that was instantly lampooned on late-night TV, parsed on cable news and dissected across social media.

For Ballesteros, the SUV ride that morning was just another moment in a blur of constant travel and filming. In the years that followed, he continued to shadow Ye across continents – Asia, Europe, Africa and back – through hotels, private jets, studios, arenas, fashion shows and family fights, his camera always recording. By the time he finally stepped away in late 2022, he had amassed more than 3,000 hours of footage, now shaped into his debut film, "In Whose Name?," an independent documentary opening Sept. 19 on more than a thousand screens.

"I would film 15, 18 hours sometimes, and the rest of those hours I was in transit," says Ballesteros, now 26, seated at a corner table at the Chateau Marmont. Lanky and soft-spoken, he carries a mix of gravity and nerves – this being the first interview of his life – as he recalls six years shadowing one of the most famous men in the world. "There was so much lack of sleep that I wasn't always consciously thinking about what was going on. My wrist would be collapsing with the camera in my hand and I'd have to jolt myself back. From the White House, we literally went straight to Uganda."

Unlike most celebrity portraits, "In Whose Name?" has no glossy packaging, no talking heads and, most unusually, no input from its subject. What emerges is an unvarnished chronicle: flashes of vision and vulnerability, spectacle and self-destruction, all captured through the lens of a young cameraman embedded in Ye's orbit. It drops viewers into a period when the rapper and fashion mogul pinballed between euphoric bursts of creativity and very public collapse – a stretch that cost him his marriage to Kim Kardashian, his billion-dollar corporate partnerships and much of his cultural standing.

Once a cultural lodestar, Ye now occupies a far more polarizing place: embraced by a loyal base, shunned by former collaborators and largely exiled from mainstream music and fashion. In February, he reignited global outrage by retracting a prior 2023 apology for his antisemitic remarks and launching into an hours-long tirade on social media – declaring he was a Nazi, professing his love for Adolf Hitler and insisting, "I'm never apologizing for my Jewish comments." In May, he released a single titled "Heil Hitler" on SoundCloud, complaining on X that the song had been "banned by all digital streaming platforms." Weeks later, he claimed on X that he was "done with antisemitism," writing, "I love all people. God forgive me for the pain I've caused."

It's against that backdrop that "In Whose Name?" arrives, but Ballesteros stresses he never set out to make a take-down. "I didn't make this to tell a story of descent or unraveling," he says. "I made it to tell a beautiful, deep story of an American figure. We live in such a headline-based society, so I believe this is the body text underneath those headlines. I'm not trying to persuade anyone. I want it to be like a Rorschach test."

Ye has no creative or financial stake in the film. Ballesteros, never on his subject's payroll, retained ownership of the footage – a remarkable fact given how fiercely Ye has fought to control his own image. Yet Ye has tacitly given it his blessing: After watching the finished cut, he texted Ballesteros, "That doc was very deep. It was like being dead and looking back on my life." (Representatives for West did not respond to a request for comment for this article.)

Ballesteros grew up in Orange County with a camera almost always in his hand, less out of Hollywood ambitions than a way of making sense of the world. A lower-middle-class child of divorce, he earned a spot at 13 in the film program at the Orange County School of the Arts, a public charter school in Santa Ana for artistically inclined students. By then, he was already treating filming like a daily practice. A documentary class in high school proved transformative. "That class was life-changing for me," he says, his conversation dotted with references that range from Andrei Tarkovsky and Hunter S. Thompson to Vice videos and YouTube creators. "It pulled me into storytelling rooted in reality. I fell in love with it."

Restless and curious, with the brazen drive of youth, he began chasing subjects wherever he could – cold-emailing Atari founder Nolan Bushnell, working with a South African artist connected to Nelson Mandela's fight for freedom, taking the train to Los Angeles at age 15 to hunt for material. As Ballesteros' attention shifted toward fashion, hip-hop and the codes of youth culture, a 2016 screening of West's "Life of Pablo" event at Madison Square Garden – part listening party, part runway show, live-streamed to theaters worldwide – hit him like a revelation.

"It was a calling," he says. "I was like, 'This is the world I want to go into and make a documentary on.'"

From there, he embedded himself in the fashion and music worlds Ye drew from, directing music videos and shooting for brands like Off-White until, when Ye's longtime documentarian left, he was a natural fit to step in. At first he was just another body behind a camera, shooting the occasional event. But soon he was invited into Ye's day-to-day orbit, following him into offices, studios and beyond.

"I viewed it as a 'Charlie and the Chocolate Factory' moment – I got the golden ticket," he says. "It was like stepping into Andy Warhol's Factory. It was an education: Let me see how he talks to [director] Spike Jonze, how creative ideas actually come to life." That curiosity, he believes, was what West picked up on. "He told me, 'When you film, you're not just documenting, you're also understanding what it could be.' That's when we started to talk."

The stakes quickly became clear. When West was hospitalized in late 2016 for exhaustion and what was termed a "psychiatric emergency," hours after canceling the remainder of his tour, Ballesteros sensed the gravity of what he was stepping into. "I was like, oh, this is much more deep," he recalls.

It also raised an uncomfortable question for a first-time filmmaker: What are the ethics of turning such vulnerability into art or profiting from someone's mental health struggles? From the outset, though, Ballesteros says West knew he intended to make a documentary and often framed it around his mental state. One of their earliest connections was a shared interest in Freud and Jung, giving Ballesteros the sense the film would always be as much a psychological excavation as a chronicle.

"When he was meeting with Pharrell, he said, 'This documentary is about mental health,'" he recalls. "That was like the first week or so of me filming inside the office. So I was very aware of that being an element. I knew that was what I was signing up for."

While the ultimate purpose of the footage was not entirely defined, West emphasized that everything was fair game. "One time he went to the dentist to get his teeth cleaned and I obviously didn't go in – I was just in the car," Ballesteros says. "His security came out to get me and I go in, and he's like, 'Hey, why'd you stop recording?' I was like, 'Oh, I thought you wanted privacy.' He's like, 'No. Never stop recording unless I tell you to.'"

The occasional times West spoke directly about the film were often in shorthand, referencing movies like "The Aviator" and "There Will Be Blood," portraits of men whose genius curdles into obsession and madness. It was a glimpse of how he seemed to frame his own story. Throughout, Ballesteros says, Ye pressed the need to "show all the sides of who we are, both the dark and the light."

"In Whose Name?" does not flinch from the darker turns. Ye is seen proclaiming himself free after going off his medication, only to spiral into rants about conspiracies against him. He describes sleeping in a bulletproof vest, rails against associates that he fears are trying to emasculate him and lashes out with bursts of rage and paranoia that leave those around him – including Kardashian and her mother Kris Jenner – visibly shaken. Ye often returns to the language of "mind control" and slavery, convinced that doctors, corporations, even members of his circle are working to direct his life.

Along with quieter moments, like a reflective visit to his childhood home in Chicago, the camera also catches him repeatedly clashing with Kardashian over his behavior. "I've been crying all day – it's just this bad dream that's not ending," she tells him in one scene after his White House visit. "I'm not about burning bridges with companies. You're going to wake up one day and you're going to have nothing." He snaps back: "Never tell me I'm going wake up one day and have nothing. Never put that into the universe." (Representatives for Kardashian did not respond to a request for comment.)

Alongside Ye's bursts of creative and spiritual inspiration – from a sweeping plan to build an ecologically sustainable city in Wyoming to his gospel-infused Sunday Service performances that drew thousands – the film tracks the controversies that torched his career. The Paris runway show where he sent out models in "White Lives Matter" shirts. The late-night tweet promising to go "death con 3 on Jewish people." The interviews that followed, laced with antisemitic tropes about Jewish control of media and money.

"I can literally say antisemitic s--- and Adidas can't drop me," he is seen boasting. Not long after, Adidas did exactly that, erasing his billionaire status and much of his cultural clout.

By the fall of 2022, Ye's empire was in tatters: Adidas cut ties, other corporate partners followed, CAA dropped him as a client and his marriage ended. The fallout is undeniable – and ongoing – but Ballesteros is careful to separate his film from West's words and actions. "I don't support antisemitism, obviously, or hate speech," he says quietly but firmly. "He and I don't share the same views ... We're human. That's really where I'm at. He's a person – he's a human."

After stepping away from Ye's world, Ballesteros was left with thousands of hours of footage and no clear plan for what to do with it. In Costa Rica in 2023, he tried to decompress while sifting through the mountain of material. Looking for a backer, the untested filmmaker turned to Simran A. Singh, a veteran music attorney who had shifted into producing, including the upcoming Netflix documentary "Selena y Los Dinos," which premiered at this year's Sundance and draws on never-before-seen footage from the late singer's family archive.

At first, Singh was hesitant to get involved. Netflix had only recently released "Jeen-yuhs," a sprawling three-part 2022 chronicle of West's rise, and Ye's recent public behavior made the prospect even harder to stomach. "Honestly, I was reluctant – another film about Ye?" Singh says. "Especially when he was saying a lot of antisemitic remarks. One of my partners is Jewish and I have a lot of close friends who are Jewish, and I would never want anyone to think I stood behind that."

What changed his mind, Singh said, was seeing the material itself. "What I saw was raw, unfiltered access you almost never get with anyone of this stature," he says. "And when I met Nico, I saw what it could be. I really believe he can be the next big director of his generation."

Singh spoke with several distributors and platforms, but many were wary of potential backlash. That hesitation pushed him toward releasing the film independently. "In complete transparency, we're self-distributing this under my banner," he says. "I didn't want to deal with corporate bureaucracy and editing that could lose the integrity of the film. We're David versus Goliath here. My wife is an EP as well, and we're extremely bullish. We believe it's meant to be seen in community and to provoke conversation."

The film's title points to the bigger questions Ballesteros hopes it raises. With its religious overtones, "In Whose Name?" nods to the trappings of faith that often surrounded West but also asks something broader about authorship and accountability. "It's posing the question: Who are we serving and why?" he says.

At the Chateau Marmont, Ballesteros blends into a corner table in a leather jacket, nursing an iced Americano, looking younger than his age and more reserved than one might expect from someone who spent six years shadowing Ye's every move. For him, the film's release is both an ending and a beginning. He's developing documentary and narrative feature projects, though he's keeping the details under wraps.

"I want to keep refining the pipeline for documentary filmmaking and keep innovating in the space," he says. "But I also want to move into scripted work – films that deal with themes of power and maybe the American dream as a through line."

For six years, Ballesteros lived within what he calls Ye's "reality distortion field," a world where access, attention, wealth and creativity bent the rules of ordinary life. Stepping back into his own world was bound to feel jarring.

"Seventy to ninety percent of my life throughout those years was with him," he says. "When I wasn't with him, it was disorienting. I just felt the weight shift when I was in that world versus out of that world."

MOVIE REVIEW

Warner Bros. Pictures / TNS

Leonardo DiCaprio stars in "One Battle After Another."

Incendiary, incisive *'One Battle After Another'* is the film of the year

By KATIE WALSH
Tribune News Service (TNS)

'One Battle After Another'

★★★★

MPA rating: R (for pervasive language, violence, sexual content, and drug use)

Running time: 2:42

How to watch: In theaters

Legendary auteur Paul Thomas Anderson has made the film of the year with the incendiary, incisive and frequently quite funny "One Battle After Another," which just happens to be a searing indictment of this particular moment in American history. Inspired by Thomas Pynchon's 1990 novel "Vineland" (this is his second Pynchon adaptation, after 2014's "Inherent Vice"), Anderson transplants the novel's Reagan-era revolutionary story to present day, loosely utilizing the general narrative and themes, but making it entirely his own. It is a film that is both chillingly prescient and deeply present in this contemporary milieu.

"One Battle After Another" feels like it could be about today, tomorrow or yesterday in America's timeline, rooted not necessarily in real events but events that feel like they could, or should, be real.

The film opens in an immigration detention camp, as a band of left-wing political militants known as the French 75 infiltrate the facility to liberate the detained, and detain the military overseers. Enchanting rebel leader Perfidia Beverly Hills (Teyana Taylor) locates Col. Stephen Lockjaw (Sean Penn) and relishes sexually humiliating him, something that he also relishes. It's a dynamic of pleasure and violence that locks the pair into a long-standing exchange of sexual power that will ultimately lead to the dissolution of the French 75, and years of persecution for its members.

Perfidia's partner is Pat (Leonardo DiCaprio), aka the Rocket Man, the French 75 explosives guy. She becomes pregnant, and when the baby is born, she beats a hasty retreat from motherhood, having chosen the right father for her child. You can't say Pat wasn't warned, as Perfidia's mother tells him, "she's a runner and you're a stump." No man could match her fiery and footloose energy.

Her story, a whirling dervish of montage, makes up the first act of the film, in which she runs risky operations while romancing her respective political paramours, betrays her comrades and disappears into thin air, leaving Pat and her baby girl to retreat into witness protection in the Northern California sanctuary city of Baktan Cross. Her daughter, renamed Willa (Chase Infiniti), grows into normal teenager who trains in martial arts and wants to hang out with her friends, chafing against the paranoia of her single father, now going by Bob, who won't allow her to have a cellphone, and passes his time smoking weed in their remote cabin.

Bob's is not garden-variety parental paranoia, though, because Lockjaw returns, and the French 75 have to knock the rust off their revolutionary skills in order to protect Willa from the maws of state-sanctioned violence that Lockjaw has mobilized in order to pluck the baby bird from her nest. Bob might be a washed-up old stoner, but he earned his stripes for a reason, and he will stop at nothing to save his daughter.

"One Battle After Another" is a tale of epic scope about the many shadowy networks and secretive factions that undergird our society while hiding in plain sight. He introduces not just the French 75, but an underground railroad for Latino immigrants run by Sensei Sergio (Benicio del Toro), a powerful white supremacist secret society, a racist backwoods militia, a convent of cannabis-cultivating nuns, all pulling the strings behind the scenes of American life. But Anderson balances the sprawling, conspiracy-minded aspects of this yarn with the intimate father-daughter story, which is the heart of the matter.

He reflects that blend of epic and intimate in the film's style, working with cinematographer Michael Bauman. The film was shot on glorious VistaVision, a higher-resolution, widescreen variant of 35mm film, imbued with a thrillingly kinetic sense of movement – the camera follows closely behind our characters as they move swiftly through space, and sweeps over stunning vistas of burning cities and monumental land masses. A climatic car chase is hypnotically rendered, lulling, trancelike before a stunning finale. Even the aerial shots have the jiggle and quiver of a helicopter, not a drone. That something so enormously scaled is clearly handcrafted is deeply moving.

Jonny Greenwood's score moves between soaring strings and dissonant piano keys, alternately soothing and anxious; a few pieces composed by Jon Brion add an ambient layer of wistfulness.

At the center of it all is DiCaprio as a bumbling dad, clad in an old robe and Solar Shields, and the performance he delivers is a harrowing, harried hoot, playing the hysterical foil to del Toro's smooth sensei. The two men have different styles but the same goal: to keep their families intact.

"One Battle After Another" isn't just an explosive revolutionary text but a story of fatherhood – the values we pass down to the next generation, and how we care for them, with love and generosity; with fear, anxiety, a little bit of hope, and above all, a whole lot of faith.

MOVIE REVIEW

Squibb elevates Johansson's directorial debut *'Eleanor the Great'*

By KATIE WALSH
Tribune News Service (TNS)

'Eleanor the Great'

★★

MPA rating: PG-13 (for thematic elements, some language and suggestive references)

Running time: 1:38

How to watch: In theaters

There's precisely one surprising moment in Scarlett Johansson's feature directorial debut "Eleanor the Great," written by Tory Kamen. It's the impetus for the entire drama that unfolds in this film, and it feels genuinely risky – a taboo that will be hard for this film to resolve. Yet, everything that unfolds around this moment is entirely predictable.

Also unsurprising? That star June Squibb's warm, humorous and slightly spiky performance elevates the wobbly material and tentative direction of "Eleanor the Great." If Johansson nails anything in her debut, it's in allowing the 95-year-old Squibb to shine in only her second starring role (the first being last year's action comedy "Thelma"). For any flaws or faults of "Eleanor the Great" (and there are some), Squibb still might make you cry, even if you don't want to.

That's the good about "Eleanor the Great," which is a bit thin and a bit treacly, despite its high-wire premise. The record-scratch startle that jump-starts the dramatic arc occurs when Eleanor (Squibb) is trying to figure out what to do with herself at a Manhattan Jewish community center after recently relocating from Florida. Her lifelong best friend and later-in-life roommate Bessie (Rita Zohar) has recently passed, and so Eleanor has moved in with her daughter Lisa (Jessica Hecht) in New York City.

Harried Lisa sends Eleanor off to the JCC for a choir class, but the impulsive and feisty nonagenarian poo-poohs the Broadway singing and instead follows a friendly face into a support group – for Holocaust survivors, as she's alarmed to discover. Put on the spot when they ask her to share her story of survival, Eleanor shares Bessie's personal history of escaping a Polish concentration camp instead, with horrific details she learned from her friend over sleepless nights of tortured memories.

Eleanor's lie could have been a small deception that played out over one afternoon, never to be spoken of again if she just ghosted the meeting, but there's a wrinkle: an NYU student, Nina (Erin Kellyman) who wants to profile Eleanor for her journalism class. Eleanor initially makes the right choice – declining to participate – before she makes the wrong one, calling Nina and inviting her over when her own grandson doesn't show up for Shabbat dinner. Thus begins a friendship built on a lie, and we know where this is going.

Anne Joyce / Sony Pictures Classics / TNS

June Squibb, left, and Erin Kellyman in "Eleanor the Great."

Nina and Eleanor continue their relationship beyond its journalistic originas because they're both lonely, and in mourning, Eleanor for Bessie, and Nina for her mother, who has also recently passed. They both struggle to connect with their family, Eleanor's terminally criticized daughter Lisa, and Roger (Chiwetel Ejiofor), Nina's TV anchor father, who is paralyzed with grief over the loss of his wife. And so they find an unlikely friend in each other, for lunches and bat mitzvah crashing and trips to Coney Island.

Eleanor decides to have a bat mitzvah herself, claiming she never had one due to the war (the reality is that she converted for marriage), but it feels mostly like a device for a big, dramatic explosion of revelation. It also serves the purpose of justifying Eleanor's well-intentioned deception with lessons from the Torah.

It's still hard to stomach her continued lying, which is perhaps why the script keeps her mostly out of the support group – where the comparison to the real survivors would be too much to bear – and in the confines of a friendship with a college student far removed from that reality. Johansson also makes the choice to flash back to Bessie's recounting of her life story when Eleanor is speaking, almost as if she's channeling her friend and her pain. The stated intent is to share Bessie's story when she no longer can, and surprisingly, everyone accepts this, perhaps because Squibb, as Eleanor, is too endearing to stay mad at.

Johansson's direction is serviceable if unremarkable, and one has to wonder why this particular script spoke to her as a directorial debut. Though it is morally complex and modest in scope, it doesn't dive deep enough into the nuance here, opting for surface-level emotional revelations. It's Squibb's performance and appealing screen presence that enables this all to work – if it does. Kellyman is terrific opposite Squibb, but this unconventional friendship tale is the kind of slight human interest story that slips from your consciousness almost as soon as it has made its brief impression.

Sameer Al-Doumy / AFP via Getty Images / TNS

June Squibb, left, and Scarlett Johansson pose during a photocall for "Eleanor the Great" at the 78th edition of the Cannes Film Festival in Cannes, France, on May 21

Robert Redford influenced Scarlett Johansson's directing debut, *'Eleanor the Great'*

By PETER LARSEN
The Orange County Register (TNS)

ANAHEIM, Calif. — As an actress, Scarlett Johansson has starred in films such as "Lost in Translation," "Girl with a Pearl Earring" and "Under the Skin." She's also appeared in 10 Marvel superhero movies as Natasha Romanoff, the Black Widow.

Her films have earned more than $15 billion, making her the biggest moneymaker of any lead actor – ever. In 2019, she was nominated for two Academy Awards in the same year as best actress and best supporting actress for "Marriage Story" and "Jojo Rabbit"

But it's watching Robert Redford direct "The Horse Whisperer" when she was his 13-year-old costar that led her to this new chapter in her career.

"Eleanor the Great" stars June Squibb as a feisty 94-year-old who returns to New York City from Florida after the death of her best friend Bessie, a Holocaust survivor. Living in Manhattan, Eleanor accidentally joins a group of Holocaust survivors at the neighborhood temple. When they ask about her story, she impulsively tells Bessie's, setting in motion events that escape her control.

In a recent video call that also included Squibb, Johansson talked about how her experience as a teen on "The Horse Whisperer" led to her directing debut with "Eleanor the Great."

"When I was a kid, I was working with Bob Redford, and just observing him on the set," Johansson says. "Just seeing his command of the set, blocking scenes, working with Bob Richardson, our director of photography, Joe Reidy, our assistant director, and just watching him in action, on his feet, doing that work.

"Then he could switch over and have these very intimate conversations with me, where he would spend the time to recount all that had happened to my character up until that moment, and help me get to where I needed to go.

"I mean, the fact that he could bounce back and forth like that to me seemed like a really interesting job," she says.

Still, she was just a teenager then, and the idea of directing movies seemed far off in the distance.

"I thought, Well, I'll do this acting thing until I'm, whatever, a grown up, and then I'll direct," Johansson says, laughing. "Then as I got older, I would say in my mid-20s, I became more interested in getting better at the acting part of the job, and understanding it on a deeper level and challenging myself in different ways."

She didn't think about directing much in those years, she says, and when she did, it no longer seemed quite as magical as it had when she was working with Redford. The filmmaker died just six days after the conversation with Johansson and Squibb.

"At some point I thought, 'Who would ever want a job like that?'" she says, laughing once more. "You're fixing all the problems and answering all the questions, and it feels so tedious, you know. It just seemed impossible to me, like a whole different brain."

It wasn't until after she founded her These Pictures production company in 2017 that the old spark reignited. When screenwriter Tory Kamen's script for "Eleanor the Great" landed on her desk, with Squibb already attached to play the title role, Johansson took the leap

Now it was time, Johansson decided, to find out what she could do behind the camera for the first time.

"Eleanor the Great" opens on Friday, Sept. 26. In an interview edited for length and clarity, Johansson and Squibb talked about what drew them to "Eleanor," how the subject of the Holocaust was woven into a story that mixes drama with comedy, and the importance of making movies about older characters such like this.

Q: Tell me about the initial appeal of the screenplay when it reached you.

JUNE SQUIBB: I read the script and knew immediately. Just a few pages, and I felt I really have to do this. I told them yes almost right away.

Q: What made it such a quick yes?

SQUIBB: It was well written, and it was written for film, which is a certain thing. And it just told me so much right away about this woman, and who she was, what she felt, and how the playing of it, the being her for so many weeks, would be. I felt, Yes, this is something for me to do.

Q: How about you, Scarlett? I read that you weren't looking for a project to direct, but then this showed up.

JOHANSSON: It did. I mean, June was attached to star in it, so I was really interested in what June Squibb was excited to star in. And it was pretty apparent. Echoing what June is saying, I could tell when I read it that it was a real showcase for June's talent, because the character is this sort of impossible person.

But then we see her. She has these moments also of real introspective, intimate moments built into the structure of the script that allow the audience to have a better understanding of what's going on internally for her, even without dialogue. So there are great moments there.

And, of course, once we are introduced to the Nina character [a college journalism student working on a story about Holocaust survivors], we see another side of Eleanor. That perhaps we were judging her in one way, and now there's this other part of her. I thought that'll be exciting to work with an actor of June's caliber and help discover what could be a showcase performance for her.

Q: Eleanor is kind of feisty; she can be little sharp, and now she's starting over at 94. How did you wrap yourself into the character, June?

SQUIBB: Well, I lived in New York, and I know New York fairly well. And I think in New York, you could do what you want to do. But at 94, how much do you want to do? [She laughs] Bessie's death is what makes the change in her life. If she hadn't died, I think they would have been continuing their lives in Florida, and I think she would have been happy with that.

You know, she lived in the Bronx rather than Manhattan, and I think there was probably a bit of, 'Oh, this will be different. This might be fun. I can imagine that this is what Eleanor was thinking, because it's a very different part of the city. I think she was probably very excited about it and yet very angry that she had to do it. It's like her life; it was very mixed up, a lot of different emotions going through it.

Q: Angry because of her loss of Bessie?

SQUIBB: Yeah, for one thing. I mean, I think she's angry about a lot of things in her life. That's just her.

Q: Scarlett, you touched on this a moment ago, how the film has a lot of different tones in it – anger, loss and grief, but also funny moments. How do you balance all those?

JOHANSSON: Part of it was working on the script and refining the script so that there were moments of both comic relief and then the balance of that, these really profound moments that could be quite surprising. You know, there's a heaviness, of course, to the material, and so I think you have to balance it with levity.

I wanted it to feel that the movie had hopefulness to it as well, and that it could move through these different moments like stages of grieving – that there was movement in the film, and it doesn't get stuck in one place for too long.

I think it's just a sensitivity to the audience experience, or in my interpretation of that. Obviously, I made the film because I love it, but I really made it for the audience. I thought about them a lot.

Q: Another element is the role that the Holocaust plays in the story, which is a tricky topic to touch upon. Both of you share the Jewish faith, and I read that the Shoah Foundation was consulted and helped out.

JOHANSSON: Yeah, I mean I don't know that I could have made the film if I didn't identify as Jewish. The Jewish identity, there's a texture of it throughout the film. It's just the humor of it and the spirit of it, too, not just the fact that it deals with the Holocaust story.

We were very lucky to have the Shoah Foundation [a nonprofit based at the University of Southern California established by director Steven Spielberg to preserve the stories of Holocaust survivors and witnesses]. I sent them the script right away, partly because I just wanted their opinion about it, you know, see what they thought, and also to be able to refine the Bessie survivor story so that we were doing an accurate portrayal of what this woman could have experienced.

And then Rita Zohar, who plays Bessie, is also a survivor herself, which is extraordinary. That was just a crazy discovery. I mean, she's an amazing actor and an accomplished actor, but it was just extraordinary that there was this even deeper layer of meaning to her portrayal.

Q: Some of the actors in the survivors group in the film were also actual Holocaust survivors?

JOHANNSON: Yes, we were able to work with the survivors in the group that we identified through Shoah. Even Jessica Hecht [who plays Eleanor's daughter] is very connected in the Jewish community in New York, and also that temple that we were using was very helpful in identifying people that could participate or wanted to participate.

If we didn't have all of those elements that are really authentic, then there would be a shallowness to it, or it wouldn't have the same nuance that I think the film does.

Q: June, what was it like working with Rita? And I'm guessing you might have met other survivors over time, too?

SQUIBB: I have, but I also was alive during World War II, and I remember we had Life and Look magazines and the pictures of the camps as they were found there. I just couldn't believe it. I was about 10, I think, something like that, and I just feel that this cannot be forgotten.

And when Rita and I talked, we just sort of got like girls, you know; we didn't have any deep conversations. I didn't even know she was a survivor until Scarlett was saying it today. We weren't talking about our characters at all. I just felt it's important to tell the story, to have this alive in whatever way we did.

JOHANSSON: Also, Rita, she's a very private person, I think actually similar to the character. It's true, talking with others about this. There's almost a shame in sharing your story. Not wanting to go back there, not wanting to revisit this horror of your past is actually not uncommon of survivors who experienced unimaginable trauma like that.

You could feel she was so moved on the days that we were working with her. She had so much difficult work to do and you felt almost like it was a cathartic experience for her. I mean, she said it was.

Q: I'd like to ask you both about working as, or with, a director who is an actor.

JOHANSSON: I don't think I could have done this job 15 years ago. It's all the experience that's led me up to this point that made it possible. And also that I had the confidence to do it. It requires that confidence; otherwise, if the director's not confident, everybody feels it on the set and it's awful. [She laughs]

And I would never want to recreate that. So it was until I felt, 'Oh, this is a story I can tell. This is a movie I can make. This is a cast I believe in.' It came out of this particular project that ignited that.

Q: And for you, June? You've worked with lots of different directors in your career. What's it like when the director is an actor?

SQUIBB: Well, it's great because you feel that they know what you're doing, how you're doing it, and what you need timewise. Do you need to do it again or do you not? I just always felt that Scarlett was there and knew immediately what I needed and where I was going.

And you do not get that – I've worked with some wonderful directors, but they have no sense of what an actor does ever. I think it surprises them sometimes. So it was great, and I loved the experience of not being pushed, of just letting it happen, and that's what it was.

Q: Scarlett, I read that you were very close to your grandmother, and June, this comes right after your starring role in "Thelma" last year. How do you see the importance of stories about and starring older people?

SQUIBB: I truly believe that the audience is now interested in aging. We're an aging population and I think people want to know about it.

JOHANSSON: I was very close to my grandmother, and certainly, there are a lot of things in this film (inspired by her); I observed so many. I think children also have such close relations with older people because the pace of life is kind of more similar in a way. You become an adult, and then you're building your own life and having your own children. The pace can be very chaotic.

My grandmother, I remember spending so much time just observing her. I remember all the qualities of her body and her wardrobe and her habits. Her fragrance in her apartment and all the textures of her life so well because we spent so much time in each other's company, just enjoying each other's company the way that Erin and Eleanor do, you know.

We talked about all kinds of stuff. We talked about relationships, we talked about sex, we talked about our bodies, we talked about our family, we talked about our dreams and our worries and all of that stuff. She had a very full life, and her days were full of thought and awareness. I think this film celebrates that and highlights that.

I think Eleanor in this film, when you see her relationship with Erin, she talks about the person that she feels that is. And she says, 'I'm the same way I was when I was 16 years old.' I mean, my grandmother used to say things like that to me all the time.

AUTOMOTIVE

AUTO REVIEWS

GTS goes hybrid the Porsche way: fast

By HENRY PAYNE
The Detroit News (TNS)

Henry Payne / The Detroit News / TNS

The 2025 Porsche 911 GTS T-Hybrid maintains the historic Gran Turismo Sport theme of offering a daily driver that can do track days.

2025 Porsche 911 GTS T-Hybrid

★★★★

Vehicle type: Rear-engine, rear-wheel-drive two-passenger sportscar

Price: $166,895, including $1,995 destination fee ($182,895 as tested)

Powerplant: 3.6-liter flat-6 cylinder mated to electric motor and 1.9 kWh battery

Power: 533 horsepower, 450 pound-feet of torque

Transmission: 8-speed, dual-clutch automatic

Performance: 0-60 mph, 2.6 seconds (Car and Driver); top speed, 194 mph

Weight: 3,590 pounds

Fuel economy: EPA, 17 mpg city/24 highway/20 combined

Report card

Highs: Big ergonomic improvements; launch control all day long

Lows: Getting' porky; increased drive-train complexity

Two years ago at M1 Concourse's American Speed Festival, I took my 1964 Porsche 904 GTS on track. The OG.

The first GTS (aka, Gran Turismo Sport) performance trim made by the German automaker, the wee, 1,450-pound 904 was one of 108 street-legal models built in 1964-65 to homologate Porsche for international racing. With my head stuffed in the ceiling and my knees in the Spartan dash, I rowed the five-speed manual gearbox around M1 – the glorious, normally aspirated, 3.0-liter flat-6 engine wailing in my ears at 7,000 rpm. Before me, my father used the 904 GTS as a daily driver for four decades in West Virginia.

Sixty years later, the legendary GTS badge lives in the roomy, 2025 Porsche 911 GTS T-Hybrid tester in my driveway: an automatic, turbocharged, gas-electric hybrid with Android Auto, 11-inch infotainment screen, 18-way heated/cooled seats, and launch control.

Toto, we're not in 1964 anymore.

In SPORT PLUS MODE, I pushed the brake pedal and accelerator pedals to the floor. The tachometer stabilized at 4,000 rpm. The instrument gauge flashed LAUNCH CONTROL SET. I released the brake and released the Kraken. BWAAAWRR!

The T-Hybrid shot past 60 mph like it has been launched from a cannon. It's a Porsche worthy of the GTS badge. Solid as oak. Stunning performance. Flat-six engine note from the gods. 911 has been a sports-car icon since it was introduced in 1963 for eight model generations. It's maintained its place with elite engineering, timeless design, incremental change, and obsessive dedication to its brand.

Like the resurrection of the GTS badge from the 904.

Representing extra performance paired with excellent trip qualities, GTS reappeared on Porsche production models like the front-engine 928 and Cayenne SUV models at the turn of the 21st century before becoming a fixture on the 911 in 2010.

The eighth-gen car (the so-called 992 series) has taken big, risky leaps at a time when technological advancements and regulatory hammers present historic challenges to the industry. My 911 992.2 (translation: the second evolution of the 992 generation) tester maintains GTS thrills by integrating new tech, resulting in a supercar that – while not the most spectacular firecracker in the market – sits at the sweet-spot of supercar speed, price, and ergonomic refinement.

The compromises? Weight gain, price gain, complexity, and more robotic performance.

911 T-Hybrid – short for Turbo Hybrid – redefines the popular conception of hybrid. For example, Porsche uses the electric motor wedged between the gearbox and engine for "torque fill." Like the $109,795 Chevrolet Corvette E-Ray, Porsche introduces electrification into its lineup a step above standard Carrera/Carrera S models, but below the track-focused GT3. Unlike E-Ray, which uses its front e-motor to create an all-wheel-drive, all-season daily driver, GTS is pure hellion.

"Oh, this is nice and stiff!" said my son as we carved corners on M-66. WAPPA! WAPPPA! went the auto downshifts as I quickly slowed into a left-hander courtesy of massive, 16.5-inch ceramic brakes.

Where the first, 1960's sportscar Golden Age set the tone for brands from Porsche to Ford, our second Golden Era has to contend with the Fun Police. The 2019 model of the 992 generation (992.1) introduced turbochargers to augment performance while also reducing CO2 emissions.

My 992.2 tester adds an e-motor (wedged between the 8-speed dual-clutch gearbox and engine) to increase power from 470 ponies to a stout 533 – while also meeting Europe's draconian emissions regs. Porsche faces a watershed moment over the next decade as the European Union gradually bans internal combustion engine sales – a game-changer for the flat-6-powered 911.

Chevy and Ford have decided not to sell Corvettes and Mustangs in Europe because European regulations make it prohibitively expensive to offer V-8s. That's not an option for Stuttgart-based Porsche, so it's meeting the challenge with a turbocharged-electrified-flat-6.

If that sounds complicated, it is. And a concern for long-term durability compared to, say, the 904's pure, normally-aspirated, 3.0-liter flat-6 screaming behind my ear at M1.

The 911 GTS's hybrid works seamlessly. WHAP! The Porsche lights like a firecracker because the e-motor doubles as starter motor. There's no turbo lag on acceleration thanks to electric torque fill. And that famed launch control? Car and Driver recorded a staggering 2.6-second 0-60 mph – a gain over 992.1's 3.2 seconds.

In northern Michigan I gave friends launch control thrill rides. Who needs Cedar Point?

For all its tech savvy, 911's fundamentals – rear-wheel-drive, rear-engine, unibody constructions – are unchanged. It's not as nimble as the lightweight, carbon-fiber-monocoque chassis McLaren 750S I tested this summer. At 3,590 pounds, the German's girth is evident compared to the 3,200-pound Brit. In 2001, 911 weighed just 3,000 pounds, but years of tech and regulation have taken their toll. McLaren's light-weight carbon-fiber solution means, ahem, a $450,000 sticker compared to my $182,895 GTS tester which in turn is nearly twice the price of the Corvette E-Ray.

Where the 911 GTS really impresses is its dexterity.

Porsche and good ergonomics are not words you would have seen in the same article a decade ago. This is a brand, after all, that denied customers a console cup-holder until the 992 generation.

But ergonomics matter in a GTS that promises good track and trip manners. New-gen 992 comes with: 1) center console cup-holder, 2) (still problematic) glovebox passenger cupholder, 3) door pocket holders for bottles (like my favorite Snapple). Also fitting nicely was my 6-foot-5-inch noggin – an advance from my ol' 904 shoebox.

The cockpit is also state-of-the-art with a similar digital tach and infotainment display to other Porsches. 911 purists will note – heresy! – that the traditional, five-gauge layout is gone, replaced with a more conventional three-gauge layout. The digital gauges are stuffed with good content – like tire temperature before engaging launch control.

The logical console is anchored by a compact "chicklet" shifter – and the steering wheel is an ergonomic gem. My hands never left the wheel. On Interstate 75 North I turned on Adaptive Cruise Control (lower left stalk) and adjusted radio volume with a roller on the wheel spoke. A rotary knob engaged SPORT PLUS mode before I ripped through the M-32 twisties.

This modernity is wrapped in timeless 911 design sitting on big, gummy, Goodyear summer tires. You'll know 992.2 by its center-locking wheels and front shutters that open in SPORT PLUS mode to feed air to the hungry beast within.

Enjoy your sixties, GTS.

Henry Payne is auto critic for The Detroit News.

2026 Audi A6/S6 Sportback e-tron EV is superbly engineered yet paradoxical

By LARRY PRINTZ
Tribune News Service (TNS)

In an age when even your refrigerator has a Wi-Fi connection, is it any wonder that the corporate titans in Ingolstadt are introducing the 375-horsepower Audi A6 Sportback e-tron and 456-horsepower A6 Sportback e-tron Quattro EVs?

Both are rolling citadels of silence, as is their sibling, the sportier 543-horsepower S6 Sportback e-tron. Yet they are every inch the performance-minded thoroughbreds. Range is rated from 324 miles to 392 miles per charge, depending on model.

Yet, considering the ghosts of Audi past and present, are these battery-electric vehicles true to their corporate heritage or are they appliances in an Armani suit?

After all, Audi was never the loudest voice in the room. Mercedes-Benz built its reputation on imperious luxury, while BMW relishes its own myth as the Ultimate Driving Machine. Audi? Audi is the Protestant cousin, the brand that arrived late to the party, quietly brilliant, relentlessly precise and always just a little aloof. Its interiors are sanctuaries of restraint, its Quattro drivetrains following the engineering Ten Commandments, which include Thou shalt not slither in the snow. Audi builds cars that are exacting and exhilarating with a relentless aversion to frivolity.

And so it goes with the 2026 Audi A6/S6 Sportback e-tron. Step inside the A6, and you find a two-tone interior and a sober band of matte-finished wood that stretches across the black trimmed instrument panel like a Weimaraner after a long nap. Directions are whispered from the headrest speaker, as though Ingolstadt decided what you really want is not navigation, but pillow talk. And the turn signal glows through a light pipe on the dashboard's corner, a quietly deliberate touch that delights industrial designers and surprises others.

However, sit behind the wheel and the spell begins to crack. The dash is very high, forcing you to have the seat cranked up so high, you find yourself hunched and peering like Richard Nixon squinting into the California sun. And Audi manages to reveal its Volkswagen corporate heritage with cheap lower door panels and a glovebox lid so flimsy, you'll expect it to fly open at any moment.

But all is forgiven once you're on the road. Here, the 2026 Audi A6 Sportback e-tron does what Audis always do: it absorbs, it smooths, it subdues. The adaptive air suspension flattens bumps with Teutonic calm while minimizing body roll. It's standard on the S6 or part of the A6's $6,300 Prestige Package. And the steering proves light and numb, unburdened by anything so basic as road feel, reminding you that this is not a BMW, and never wants to be. Consider it serenity if you're in the right mood. Call it anesthesia if you're not.

And then there's the S6 Sportback e-tron, which is an altogether different beast. Not a beast in the sense of a Tesla, loud, brash and eager to announce its brilliance like a Silicon Valley intern. Instead, the S6 e-tron is more dangerous than that. Its speed arrives with silk gloves. Triple digits appear with such rapidity and utter lack of drama. Whereas other electric performance cars propel you with a roller-coaster, stomach-churning intensity, the S6 simply inclines its head, pours another glass of Riesling, and whisks you to an unlawful velocity with all the ceremony of a maître d' removing a plate from the table. It's speed with a pinky finger extended.

Yet the brilliance is marred by pedals that are jammed tightly together on the right, forcing your right leg against the center console, which is made of hard, unyielding plastic. In a Volkswagen Golf, this could be excused. But in a pricey, luxury EV? Someone in Ingolstadt must believe that discomfort is a form of discipline.

And so, we arrive at the great paradox of Audi in the electric age.

Here is a car that is immaculately engineered, superbly finished, as quiet as a cathedral at three in the morning and as fast as a lawyer chasing an ambulance. It's luxurious in the European sense; restrained, tasteful and more about the absence of vulgarity than the presence of joy. It does not swaddle you in excess like Bentley. It does not thump its chest like a Mercedes-AMG, nor does it cajole you into mischief like a BMW M. It simply does everything right and nothing wrong, and leaves you in awe of its supreme competence. Like the Audis that have preceded it, the Audi A6 and S6 Sportback e-tron EVs make the case that luxury is about precision, discipline, and the slow extinguishing of whimsy. They are magnificent automobiles, brilliant in execution, if somewhat bereft of humanity.

Larry Printz is an automotive journalist based in South Florida.

2026 Audi A6/S6 Sportback e-tron

Base prices: $67,195-$$79,995

Powertrain: Single or dual electric motors

Horsepower: 375-543

EPA-rated range: 324-392 miles

Recharge time (240v): 11.5 hours

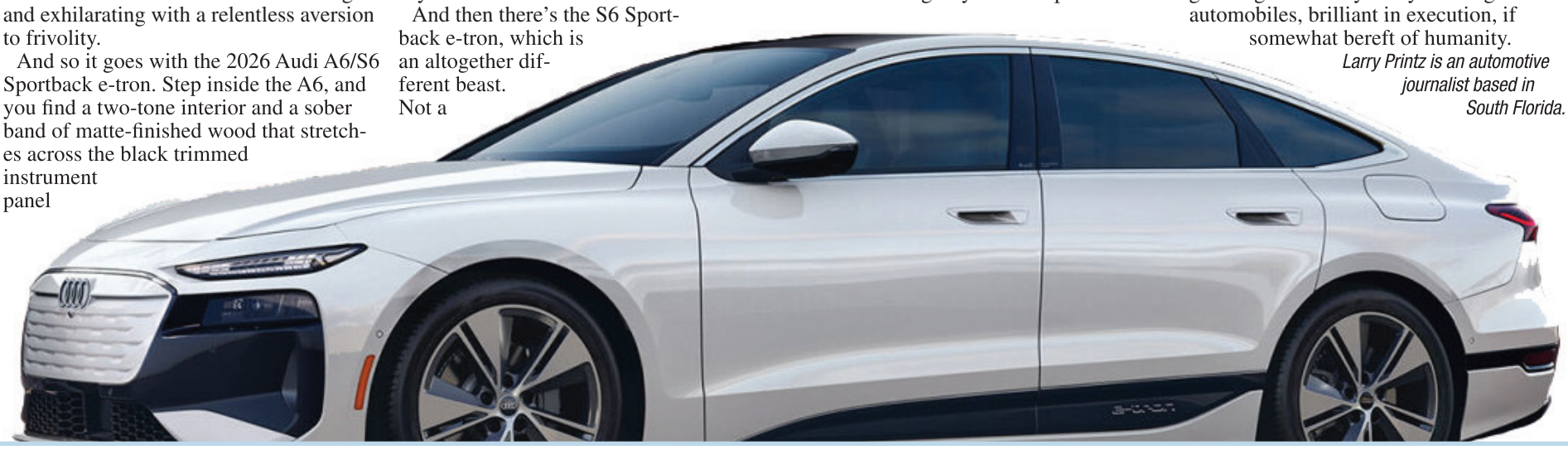
Length/Width/Height: 194/76/59 inches

Ground clearance: Not listed

Payload: Not listed

Cargo capacity: 26-40 cubic feet

Towing capacity: Not rated



Audi / TNS

TECHNOLOGY

2025's best Gaming TVs

By CNET.COM (TNS)

If you're looking to buy the best gaming TV for your home entertainment setup, the best models combine excellent image quality with low input lag. It's essential for a TV to have shorter response times, as this can make the difference between winning and losing a game.

As far as picture quality is concerned, Dolby Vision support is also beneficial, though it's not essential. Furthermore, if you're looking to pair your gaming TV with a PlayStation 5 or Xbox Series X – or both – you'll need a TV with HDMI 2.1, 120Hz and variable refresh rates.

At CNET, we've tested hundreds of TVs using side-by-side comparisons, evaluating both gaming performance and picture quality, and the following gaming TVs are the ones we recommend. The three TVs featured here are our top picks.

The following CNET staff contributed to this story: CNET Editor Ty Pendlebury and Managing Copy Editor Nick Hide. For more reviews of personal technology products, visit www.cnet.com.

LG C4 OLED
BEST GAMING TV OVERALL

Josh Goldman / CNET / TNS

CNET TAKE: While this year's LG G5 is the ultimate gaming TV, not everyone wants or needs to pay over $3,000 to play their favorite games. The 2024 C4 offers 100 percent of the gaming features and about 80 percent of the picture quality at half the price – that's what we call mathematics! If you're looking for a TV that's fun to game on and looks just as good with movies, the C4 is a great buy.

Its Game Optimizer menu gathers all the gaming settings in one place and verifies refresh rate, VRR status and more at a glance. We also appreciate the ability to edit the gaming dashboard to swap in more status indicators (resolution, Dolby Atmos and so on). It scored an excellent input lag result of just 13.5ms for both 1080p and 4K HDR sources, which you can cut further with a Boost mode, but that's only available for 60Hz sources.

Samsung DU7200
BEST BUDGET GAMING TV

Ty Pendlebury / CNET / TNS

CNET TAKE: Whether you're a gamer or just want a TV that will fit in the bedroom, the Samsung DU7200 is a really good choice. It's got a pretty punchy picture for the money – under $500 – and plenty of streaming options.

The DU7200 delivers a solid picture for an affordable price. The black levels and shadow detail are excellent for the money, and while my test unit looked a little desaturated out of the box, that was easily fixed by adjusting the color control.

The TV has onboard streaming, and the sound quality isn't too bad either.

If you're looking for a bedroom unit or a smaller gaming TV, the Samsung DU7200 is the model we would choose. Don't buy it if you're a stickler for image quality, but for the price, it's pretty great.

Roku Pro Series
BEST 4K GAMING TV

Ty Pendlebury / CNET / TNS

CNET TAKE: If you're looking for a gaming TV and don't want to spend the money on an OLED model, the Roku Pro is a solid choice. It will do 4K HDR and Dolby Vision. And, as you'd expect, it has Roku on board, so you know it has one of the most comprehensive suites of streaming apps on the planet.

It boasts a quick response time and is decently accurate in terms of color and shadow detail. Almost every unit I've reviewed recently has a gaming mode and undetectable pixel response times (under 15ms). This matters because the Roku doesn't have the best picture I've seen for less than $1,000, but the TCL QM6K, for example, does.

The Roku Pro is the best Roku-branded TV yet, and it's often on sale for a few hundred dollars less – so it's great for people who want to save some money on a gaming TV with a great smart TV system.

What happens to your Facebook account when you die?

By JIM ROSSMAN
Tribune News Service (TNS)

I was doing some poking around in my Facebook account settings this week and I came across a setting that I needed to configure – the Legacy contact.

I hope you're familiar with the setting, but I also hope you don't have to use it for a very long time.

The Facebook Legacy Contact is a person who you designate to be able to administer your Facebook account after your death.

When a Facebook user dies, a request can be made to memorialize their account, which makes some changes, including adding the word "Remembering" before your name on your Facebook page.

Any family member or friend can send Facebook a memorialization request for a deceased user. There's a place on the memorialization request to upload proof of death.

Friends can still post memories that'll show up on the memorialized page, but that setting can also be turned off to "freeze" the page.

Posts and photos the person shared will stay on the page and will be visible to friends.

Memorialized profiles don't appear in public spaces, such as People You May Know or Birthdays.

If there's a Legacy Contact on the account, they are the only one that can make changes. If no Legacy Contact was named, no one will be able to log into the memorialized account.

To set up a Legacy Contact, log into your Facebook page and go to the Settings and Privacy and then Settings. Click on Accounts Center and find Personal Details under Account Settings.

Select Account Ownership and Control, click on Memorialization and select your account.

Choose Memorialize and then you can select your desired Legacy Contact from your friend list. You can also choose to let that Legacy Contact download your Facebook data. You can also choose to have a message sent telling your friend that you've chosen them as your Legacy Contact.

You don't have to have Facebook send them a message if you'd rather tell them, which I recommend.

Finally, you don't have to leave your account up on Facebook after you die. You can choose in the settings to just have your Facebook account deleted after your death.

Jim Rossman is a tech columnist for Tribune News Service. He may be reached at jrossmantechadviser@gmail.com.

GADGETS

Taking a look at smart locks

By GREGG ELLMAN
Tribune News Service (TNS)

The Nuki smart lock boasts high-quality hardware, seamless integration capabilities and a stylish design, as described by the company. The innovative lock is new to the U.S. market after having established itself as the top-selling smart lock in Europe.

Add that its installation is among the easiest I've seen for a smart lock, which is critical. Smart lock installation might sound complicated in itself, but trust me, this one is a breeze. Once you have your hardware, the instructions are straightforward.

It mounts on the inside of your door, right on top of the existing cylinder hole that held the back end of the deadbolt lock. With this inside replacement, your key and lock remain the same; you're adding hardware and advanced technology to open it. Replacing just the inside of your existing deadbolt avoids you having to drill any new holes.

Thus, you'll still have the traditional opening with a key, but also the digital entry. The two screw installation takes just minutes.

Once installed and connected to your home Wi-Fi, your door key can officially be a thing of the past. The lock can be opened in a second with the Nuki app, an Apple Watch or by adding an accessory keypad. The app offers endless information and features, including the ability to share remote keys with family and friends. If you're inside and want to lock or unlock, all it takes is the press of a button.

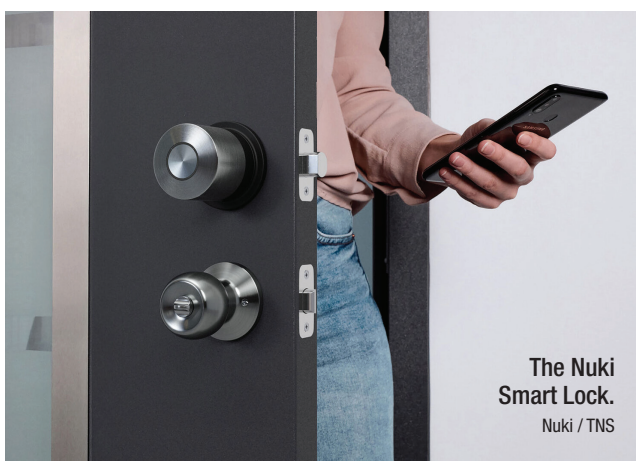
Nuki Premium is an add-on ($5.90 per month) that unlocks even more features, including remote access to control the lock from anywhere. Premium also adds real-time notifications and battery level warnings before a USB-C charge is needed. The immediate replacement guarantee gets you a replacement in the event the Nuki lock is defective. Premium also adds features for rental homes, including automated access management to support your vacation rental business.

Nuki currently has a special offer: If you activate the Premium service before the end of September, it will be free for the entire lifetime of the connected smart lock.

If you prefer a keypad, the Nuki Keypad 2 can be added to unlock your door with a code or fingerprint. Up to 20 different fingerprints and 200 codes with individual access rights can be added. The Keypad 2 is dust-proof and waterproof, and withstands temperatures between -4°F and 158°F.

Before you purchase the lock, Nuki has a handy page on their site to make sure the lock can be installed in your door. The internal rechargeable battery is rated to last up to 12 months when connected via Thread or Bluetooth, and up to 6 months when using built-in Wi-Fi. A full charge takes about 2 hours.

https://nuki.io/en-us
Nuki Smart Lock $159, Keypad 2 $159. A combo set with the lock and keypad 2 is $229.



The Nuki Smart Lock.
Nuki / TNS

With the Lockly Visage smart lock, all you have to do is look at it to unlock it.

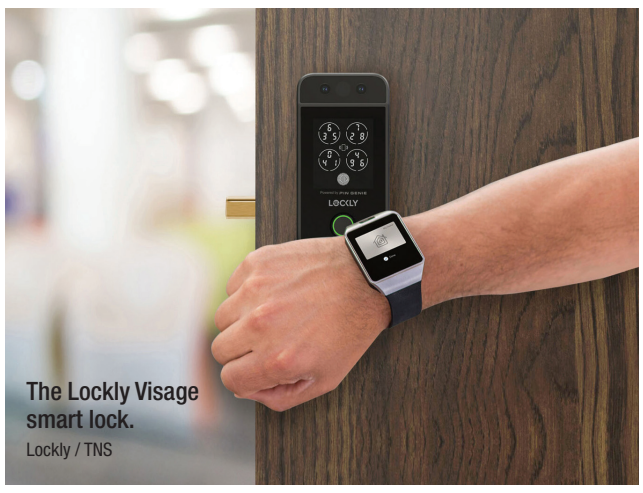
The lock is part of Lockly's Zeno Series, their first with facial recognition technology. Once you face it, it will be unlocked in under one second when you're within about 3 feet. It's also Apple Home compatible with Home Key accessibility.

With the built-in Apple compatibility technology, once programmed, you'll be able to unlock it with just a tap of your iPhone or Apple Watch, or request it from Siri to unlock. The lock is equipped with both Wi-Fi and Bluetooth features, as well as a hack-proof digital keypad.

For those seeking peace of mind, there is also a keyhole for traditional key use. It can be rekeyed without changing the entire lock to match the key with others in your home.

I'm familiar with Lockly locks since it's what's on my front door, and the keypad is something that sells the lock alone. Besides facial recognition (which works perfectly), you can also open the lock with fingerprint recognition in as fast as 0.2 seconds or a stored code. It can generate up to 999 unique access codes with specific permissions tailored to the users' required access.

With the keypads' numeric keypad, the codes are shuffled for an extra layer of security. Your code remains the same; it's the numbers on the digital display that are shuffled, so they are never in the same place with the same sequence. The personal identification number Genie rotating digital keypad prevents password guessing. If you have wandering eyes watching you input the code, the numbers have been shuffled the very next time anyone approaches the keypad, preventing someone from performing the same sequence and trying to guess your PIN.



The Lockly Visage smart lock.
Lockly / TNS

The weatherproof deadbolt lock features an attractive design with a matte black finish and voice assistant connections. It can be controlled by anyone with access from anywhere in the world. Other features include digital sharing of access codes, creating schedules with limitations, checking status through the Lockly app, and receiving real-time notifications.

Installation is straightforward. It is rated to last up to 8 months before the pair of environmentally friendly, rechargeable lithium batteries needs recharging.

https://lockly.com/products/lockly-visage-zeno-series $349

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Lime and orange help to make this lower level feel bright and welcoming.
Handout / TNS photos

DESIGN RECIPES

Fruit-inspired colors

By CATHY HOBBS
Tribune News Service (TNS)

Looking for a way to bring instant energy, warmth, and personality into your space? Consider the beauty of fruit colors. Think lemon, lime, raspberry and orange – these juicy hues can transform a neutral room into a vibrant and inviting space with a robust and appealing "punch" of color.

Looking for ways to infuse fruit inspired colors? First, choose a color for inspiration.

- Orange brings luxury and warmth
- Lime adds freshness and energy
- Lemon will add a sense of light
- Raspberry offers a chic, eclectic touch

Start with a neutral base

Fruit colors shine brightest when they're grounded by a calm, neutral backdrop. Let your walls, flooring or main upholstery pieces set a neutral foundation so that vibrant, fruit colors can take center stage. Think soft white walls, pale floors or muted upholstery, then pair with bright pops of color.

Layer your fruit palette

Just like a mixed fruit salad, combining multiple hues can be deliciously effective. Deep orange and lime create a modern, sunny look. Raspberry paired with lime and orange can create a modern, sunny look that feels fresh and uplifting.

Think beyond accessories

Fruit colors aren't just for throw pillows or vases. Try a raspberry accent chair, a citrus-hued rug, or lime green cabinetry in a kitchen or laundry room. Even in a lower-level living space, a pop of lime with a splash of orange can instantly make the area feel brighter, warmer and more inviting.

Cathy Hobbs is the owner of Cathy Hobbs Design Recipes, a home staging company based in New York City (www.cathyhobbs.com). She is also the owner of Highland Passive House, a Home Staging + Design Center based in New York's Hudson Valley (www.highlandpassivehouse.com). Cathy's practical, how-to design advice can also be found in her book, "Home Design Recipes."

ABOVE: Deep orange helps to make this living room feel luxurious and glamorous. **BELOW LEFT:** A mix of raspberry, lime and orange add "pops of color" in this living space. **BELOW RIGHT:** A mix of berry colors creates a pleasing yet eclectic aesthetic.

How should I decorate my porch for fall?

Angie Hicks
Ask Angi

Fall is nature's grand finale and my favorite season, bringing brightly colored leaves, crisp mornings, and that unmistakable scent of cinnamon and pumpkin spice. It's also the perfect time to decorate your porch and convert it into a warm, inviting extension of your home.

Whether you lean rustic and cozy, sleek and modern, or somewhere in between, a few well-placed touches can transform your entryway into a seasonal showpiece. Here are 10 ways to welcome autumn to your doorstep.

1. Start with a seasonal welcome

Your front door sets the tone, so give it an instant fall refresh. A lush wreath of greenery, dried hydrangeas or mini pumpkins can make a statement before anyone steps inside. Layer a weatherproof rug beneath a coir welcome mat for texture, and swap in a playful autumn graphic for extra cheer.

2. Pile on nature's bounty

Nothing says fall like the raw beauty of the season's harvest. Stack pumpkins of varying sizes on your steps, fill a wooden crate with gourds or scatter pinecones, acorns and wheat bundles along the porch rail. These touches connect your home to the outdoors and offer a look that's charming, low-cost and easy to refresh as the weeks roll by.

3. Warm up with cozy seating

A pair of Adirondack chairs, a cushioned porch swing or a weather-resistant rocker invites long chats and lazy evenings. Dress them with plaid or earth-toned throw pillows, drape a chunky knit blanket over the arm, and you've created a perfect perch for sipping cider and watching the leaves drift down.

Dreamstime / TNS
Autumn is a perfect time to showcase nature in your decor.

4. Play with autumn's color palette

Burnt orange, deep crimson and golden yellow practically announce the season on their own. Add them through pillows, planters, or a freshly painted front door. For a subtle nod, weave in warm wood tones or earth-colored ceramics that blend with your landscaping and hardscape.

5. Add life with flowers and greenery

From bright marigolds to hardy mums, autumn flowers thrive in cooler weather and add bursts of color to your porch. Arrange them in rustic baskets, galvanized tubs or tall ceramic planters. Hanging baskets can fill vertical space, while symmetrical topiary trees flanking the door bring structure and elegance.

6. Layer in texture

Fall is all about tactile comfort. Use woven baskets, rattan accents and weathered wood to add depth. Swap out summer's smooth cottons for velvet cushions, wool throws and burlap table runners. Even your lanterns, vases and planters can get a textured upgrade with rope trim or distressed finishes.

7. Light the way

Autumn evenings arrive early, so good lighting is both practical and atmospheric. String fairy lights along the railing, line your steps with lanterns filled with faux candles or add wall sconces beside the door. A few well-placed lights can draw attention to architectural details and extend your porch's use into the night.

8. Mix in whimsy

Little surprises can make your porch memorable. Garden statues peeking from behind planters, a vintage wheelbarrow brimming with fall blooms, or even cheerful pinwheels catching the autumn breeze can add charm. Seasonal flags and ornamental door baskets are simple swaps that make a big impact without a big budget.

9. Rotate with the seasons

Think of your porch as a year-round display. In fall, line the stairs with pumpkins; in winter, swap them for pine boughs and holly. Spring can bring tulips in window boxes, while summer shines with sunflowers and ferns. By planning for seasonal transitions, you keep your porch fresh and inviting all year.

10. Make it personal

At the end of the day, your porch should feel like your own. Maybe that means oversized house numbers for a modern pop, a water feature for soothing sound or even a pet-friendly spot so your four-legged friend can join you outside. Whatever your style, the key is to blend comfort, function and personality.

Tweet your home care questions with #AskingAngi and we'll try to answer them in a future column.